# BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

CORRESPONDENCE ENGLISH
BUSINESS LETTER WRITING CUSTOMS
FILES AND SYSTEMS
WRITING EFFECTIVE BUSINESS LETTERS

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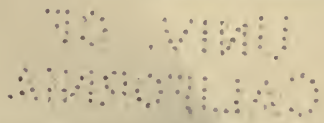

# PREFACE

The business man who sees the sure result of a satisfactorily-handled letter naturally wants to know "how it is done." Many books are in existence which give a great deal of information about certain essentials of letter-writing, but there has always seemed to be lacking in most of these works the specific directions which a broad business man needs to produce a well-written letter.

It is not to be supposed that the more common details and essentials need be given much space, for that is not what is demanded. Rather, about the essentials should be grouped such facts as experience has taught those who are in touch with business conditions are the broad truths, the large views of this important science.

This, indeed, is the aim of the entire Business Men's Library, of which this is the **second volume.**

Part I, "The Principles and Factors of the Art of Correspondence," takes up in its initial chapters the general underlying factors, these becoming more specific until Part II, "Correspondence in the Various Departments of Business," is reached. Here departmental correspondence is treated in detail. Beginning with the form letter which initiates a sale, and continuing through the various departments which make use of the written communication, there will be found that specific information which has built many a business from the smallest of small beginnings to industrial enterprises whose fame is world-wide.

Part III, "System in Handling Correspondence"

details follow-up and filing methods replete with exact information and suggestions adaptable to the business just starting or the one handling thousands of communications daily.

All this it is trusted makes up a composite, so planned and executed as to inspire not only the ambitious correspondent but as well the man of affairs, who, because he has succeeded, is none the less open to counsel and suggestion.

THE EDITOR.

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# PART I

# THE PRINCIPLES AND FACTORS OF CORRESPONDENCE

# CHAPTER I

## FIRST PRINCIPLES OF GOOD BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

BY WILLIAM CLENDENIN

Is letter-writing a lost art? The press of the whole country has taken up this question and turned it into a live subject of discussion.

Business men and mercantile interests are naturally the first to profit by this agitation, for the American people are a commercial people and whatever touches the nerves of a business organism has the right of way clear through to the head-center, where the man at the heart of things does the deciding. It's a manager's question, a vital one.

Business correspondence has many sides, many varying viewpoints—different styles of composition—different stationery—different phases of the same proposition—but all looking alike to the same end—results, orders, sales, dollars. And it is these basic principles—the things to do and the reasons why—and the main rules—the general orders—which constitute the real subject when a business man sits down to study it out.

**The Two Basic Elements**

In the regular run of business letters it is the first one in the series—the opening gun—that makes or mars the success of the attempt. This first letter from a firm is like the going-coupon of a return trip ticket—void if detached—lost, if it brings no answer. Right here is the natural field for salesmanship by correspondence; the

right time for craft in stating a case, arousing curiosity, getting the benefit of first impression and opening a breach in the opportunity.

The question, then is—what are the basic elements of a result-bringing business letter. They reduce themselves to just two: "ideas" and "words;" they are preferably used together, for either is useless without the other. So the old saw—and one worth framing for every correspondent's desk in the country—"Depend upon it, Toby—it's words that make another man's mare go your road" should have added to it—"and those words must express ideas that will appeal to the other man."

But ideas and words take time—well chosen, they take a good deal of time—and there's the rub and the reason for half of the poor letters to-day. Writers won't take the time—they think they can't, and say so frankly enough. But they can, and the business-getters—the "fetchers"—put hours on a "letter-idea"—and they make it pay.

I have an idea that the post-office and stenography have killed the quality in letter-writing; that the "trick of speed" is responsible for the loss of charm if not for the loss of letter-character and wholesome originality. The ideas may be there, but the accurate choice of words is sacrificed in order to make time.

One thing at least is certain enough—the hurried rush letter now current very often falls short of the mark; no question at all of the gun or the shell, but no time for the aim—rapid fire—one hit out of a hundred.

This sort of thing in correspondence leaves the sensation of disorder and unrest in the mind of the reader, with consequent loss of effect and waste of effort on both sides.

This is the fault on the "words" side of correspondence. Now for the cure.

Concentration is the remedy. But we can't expect too much concentration too long sustained. An idea in this connection is a pocket letter-book —what some correspondents call "notions"—in which to jot down different synonyms of the strong words covering a given case. I have seen one "notion book" with pages of striking sentences on the same subject—and the force of the suggestion and the value of it to the business writer is the way it helps save him from stock-phrases; he gets into the habit of putting the same thought in different forms—new ways. It keeps the business young and fresh in his mind, shows new colors, new combinations, and gives the writer himself the habit of originality, of invention, of correspondence ingenuity, elasticity, and enterprise. The practice is worth trying.

**The First Requisite—Right Words**

Study words. "Don't look at words—look into them."

There is an immense suggestiveness in words—in the choice of words. It was Alexander Hamilton who said that the "choice of words requires the greatest faculty of the human mind—selection."

Hawthorne speaks of the "unaccountable spell that lurks in a syllable."

And yet there is no "black art" about it, nothing to be afraid of. We can look a word in the face without being stared out of countenance, and the study is one that will pay any man well for his time. "Every word Webster spoke weighed a pound." "Every sentence came rolling like a wave of the Atlantic, three thousand miles long."

**The Test by Which to Choose Words**

And there's character in words. "Eager words,"

Shakespere observes, and "faint words"—"tired words" —"weak words"—"brave words"—"sick words"—and "successful words."

"A word," he says, "is short and quick, but works a long result; therefore, look well to words." Simple words, and, above all, the old English forms, are much the stronger, and strikingly so in commercial correspondence, and, in fact, in commercial life. Hard-hitting, clean-cut, God-fearing Anglo-Saxon is the stoutest and safest thought carrier we have.

A few comparisons prove this. Compare the sturdy vigor and hearty welcome of the words, "Come in!" with the more polished invitation, "You are cordially invited to enter." "Keep out" is a stronger bar than "Positively no admittance."

It will pay any correspondent to add Mathews' "Words, Their Use and Abuse," to his business library. And there could be no better text-book in a business college required course than Horatio Seymour's "The Use of Short Words."

Lip-lazy writers, too indolent to dig for order-clutching English, won't do this, but a word-student is usually a good correspondent. A good short word may save a long letter.

Voltaire said the English gained two hours a day by chopping their words—even Thomas W. Lawson delights in what he calls "chunk English." And that was an old trick of our mother tongue that took two commoners like "proud" and "dance" and made them "prance"—for the sake of economy.

But back of all language are the thoughts themselves. Shakespeare says: "I will look again upon the intellect of the letter." Mr. Lockwood expresses it not quite so elegantly: "Any fool can write—but put

thought into it—that's work." Which is quite in line with the homely observation of an old Cincinnati business man who said: "What the commercial world wants is meat and potatoes—not cake." And it's good, specific stuff—not froth—that's called for anywhere.

That's it. The best letter writer in a business house to-day is the man who puts life and action into his correspondence; vivid ideas; originality of expression; personality, force, and even daring; the self-same elements exactly that make for strength in personal contact.

If this is seriously and steadfastly undertaken and persevered in, the result is the development of "style"—and "style is the man himself." A letter is part of a man's character; you can put soul into it or leave it out, according as the writer has one or not, or simply shuffles along the calf-path of precedent. Things wear themselves out by overuse in every walk of life. It is so of words.

The vital thing, first of all, is to get away from stereotyped forms of expression. There is a sameness and staleness altogether too common in first letters. Too much of the rut and the mire, too much fishing inshore, and too much forgetting about bait and new hooks.

I have even heard of a hide-bound correspondent who recalled a letter at the postoffice after it had been mailed, explaining that he had "inadvertently omitted" his stock phrase of "awaiting your favorable reply, I remain, etc." Everybody remembers the historic letter of the old Holland merchant, which wound up with the words, "Sugar is falling more and more every day, but not so the respect and esteem with which I remain, yours very truly."

Take the conventional invocation of the "common herd of business letters:"

"Dear Sir:

"We take great pleasure in sending you," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"Our fall catalogue offers," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"Our goods present bargains," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"We shall be pleased to receive your order," etc.; "our goods," etc.; "the growth of our business," etc.

A whole range and gamut of sheer waste of words. "We," "we," "our," "we" this, and "we" that—all alike—all about us.

What about the "other fellow?"

**The Other Fellow's Wants**

The "we habit" is a violation of the first rule of good correspondence. The business man who opens a business letter is naturally rather more interested in himself and his affairs than in yours. Ethically, it is too bad that this is the case, but it is nevertheless true, and therefore a condition of "approach" to be reckoned with and studied. The correspondent should strive not only to overcome this fact but to take advantage of it. And there is a way to do it: go to the other extreme—take the other tack and make your opening read:

"Dear Sir:

"You have an argument for our fall line that is strong. You," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"Your interest in a good sales point for," etc.

"You," "you," "your," "your business"—not ours—not we.

Famous letter-writers follow this rule religiously. Let me quote some of the old masters of good English —famous letters—letters that live.

"Dear Sir:

"Whatever you may be thinking," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"You have by this time," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"Just as your interests appear."

"Dear Sir:

"You know that," etc.

"Dear Sir:

"This letter to you is," etc.

In other words, the drive of the correspondent should be at the self-interest of the addressee—not the reverse of it.

There's another thought in this, and that is, that even some of our best commercial writers make the mistake of assuming a prospective customer's interest instead of studying to attract it. We can not afford to ignore the craft and subtlety there is in leading a prospect into wanting the very thing you want him to want. This is what the colleges call "the psychology of suggestion"—and a great study. The secret of it is to suggest the idea of advantage in doing business with you—without flaunting it at him by stupid, wide-open expressions, as, "We are very desirous of receiving an order from you." Of course you are. He knows that. Why tell him about it and call his attention to your side of it—your gain and profit?

**Attract, Not Assume, Another's Interest**

A good business letter pleases without betraying the effort to do so.

A long time ago Addison said a mighty significant thing about this:

"They more had pleased us,
Had they pleased us less."

Advertisers have a precept very much the same, which says: "Avoid the appearance of advertising." It is a first rule of good salesmanship. And it pays to get over the fence on the other man's side once in a while, and look back at yourself. Not infrequently you may see things there.

Let me call attention to a popular fallacy: That business letters are conversation by mail. They are by no means conversation by mail. To converse carries the suggestion of ease, of friendly intercourse, congenial chat—pleasant, agreeable—but not necessarily business. Business letters go further than that. A business letter is a veritable living argument—intense—personal—important; it is yourself in action—the man there before you listening—your cause at issue—and the result depending there and then, right now, upon what you have to say and the way you say it. It is not conversation; it is solicitation and debate—serious and earnest—strong as you know how to make it. And here is where words and ideas count—the force and power of the right word in the right place.

**Business Correspondence Is Argument**

We can make our letters characteristic and unusual, that is, we can make them like ourselves, and say things as though we meant them, and still not sacrifice the proprieties nor violate the rules of good taste.

Again the question—how?

To do this successfully, I believe, requires no other

effort than the exercise of a reasonable quota of common sense. Let me explain. When you write a letter, you unconsciously emphasize certain words in it that make your meaning clear; that is, you do so mentally though there is no mark or arrangement of words to indicate your intention. For instance, take up one of your own letters—and read it as a stranger might. How seldom will you hear another read a letter of yours quite the way you would read it. For instance, in the matter of emphasis, take this familiar sentence: "We were not there." Nine men of ten will emphasize the word "there;" in fact, the natural balance and euphony of the sentence throws it there; yet that is not the significance. There is no question raised as to the locality or situation—it is the negative "not" that is entitled to the stress: "We were not there."

**The Natural Emphasis**

In the same way people of the corn states say, "I guess so," while the southern vernacular is, "I reckon so."

This question of misplaced stress is a most important one in correspondence and, so far as observation goes, it is usually unnoticed and even disregarded by business writers, although the fate of a letter may depend upon it, its meaning be entirely misunderstood, or its force lost. This, then is one study. There is another needful one for the successful writer of good letters—some respect for the different standards of style in the different sections of the country.

**Moulding Style to The Person Addressed**

A letter to cultured Boston is rather more likely to fall beneath the eye of college-trained nicety and preciseness than one that reaches the ranch store at Cheyenne for "Sam Pete, workin' for the Alaho people."

The old South—the Virginias and the far South—are characterized by more embellishment and rich ornament of diction than they of the North, who are more blunt and abrupt in style.

These things, then, are factors in letter writing. Not fads, nor fancies, but facts.

Local color and traditions, too, have a bearing upon the "translation" of letters, as we might call it. George Eliot says: "The meaning we attach to words depends on our own feeling. Possibly no word has exactly the same meaning to any two persons." To one it may recall some peculiar effect of long ago—awaken memory and incline to retrospect; to another some new, unexpected idea is suggested, inspiration, scheme or plan, and redoubled activity.

In short, the correspondent having in charge the house letters to a group of states should study the history of that section of the country and its people, and read occasionally some good newspaper of the district, and especially the local trade review. This gives local color and familiarity with the concern and interests of the people to whom he is writing, and with whom he is dealing.

**Improve Style by Finding Weaknesses**

If my reader—a correspondent—will first write out a business letter just as the ideas come to him, and then study it over when the ink is dry, he will see many a waste word—many a nuisance word even—and many a gap in ideas he should not have left unfilled. An excellent drill is to send to the files for back correspondence—old letters—and study them all over again—see where the main point could have been more clearly put; study the reply letter—and see where the going letter was weak or vague, or strong and clear. Two hours

a week—or even an hour a week—of this "review-work" in correspondence will do wonders. It is just as helpful as review study in any other activity or study—and a correspondent, like every other business man, must go ahead or go back—standing still means going back.

One great cause of weakness in business letters is the dread of appearing plain—the downright unwillingness to declare oneself in a plain, homely fashion. If any of you doubt the difference in force and effect of the two styles, an evening's perusal of "The Despatches of Napoleon," compared with his "Vatican correspondence," will make the distinction clear and practicable. Read the Standard Oil letters quoted in Miss Tarbell's history of that company. Read the "Bond Offerings" of J. P. Morgan & Co., or some of the letters running through all the reports of the Inter-State Commerce Commission.

Studies like these are accessible in every city and the art of good letter writing may be cultivated. Pope says:

"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, as those move easiest who have learned to dance."

Successful correspondents are often audacious in compelling attention; some of them go so far as to actually coin a new word or expression which better serves the purpose and helps drive home the point. There is good authority for this, plenty of it. St. Paul was one of the boldest of word coiners. He originated six hundred Greek words in the Epistles alone. Some further precedent in this connection is that of a modern master of linguistic innovation, who declared himself a "contributor to the language, and not a consumer." And there isn't much danger in it, either, for what we call

**Word Coinage and Expression**

"pure English" is decidedly a composite, a mosaic almost, and of very kaleidoscopic tendencies. Any good writer may fairly regard it as a property rather than a proprietor. Language is a utility, a tool to be sharpened to each man's need and use. It is something to work with—not under. There is no law about it.

Let me say a word about the much-mooted theory of style—business style, managerial style, and "house style." "Choose your own style; it should be part of you; choose you, perhaps, rather than you choose it." There's a world of help in that quotation for any writer of letters, for any man at the heart of a business.

The best horse is not the one in which the spirit has been broken. Breaking a man in is like breaking in a horse. You can curb him to the harness without breaking him down—and it isn't every man who can break a horse.

**Style a Synonym for Personality**

Style means to be personal—to be strong—honest—spontaneous—to appeal in behalf of your cause with freedom—openly—even boldly—any decent thing to get yourself heard in the reading. What you are after is the effect, the answer, the "come-back," the return coupon. And paragraphing is a large item in the bill of good commercial literature. Business writers pay too little attention to it. It is a rule with the press to open a story with a brief, brisk sentence, stating sweepingly what it's all about—"then period-paragraph." The same rule is a good one in office work.

Heavy, solid sentences, running straightaway half down the page, like body-type, are fatal.

Chop them up—paragraph—ease the eye of the reader—help him along—make it easy and attractive.

The most effective letter, mechanically, is the

well-written, wide-margin, double-space, paragraphed letter—one page and quit.

Knowing when to quit is a good sign of a good correspondent, and the whole philosophy of the subject may be summed up in the syllables, "learn first," like Abraham Lincoln, "what demonstrate means," then "make your words as good as your bonds—and every letter will be a letter of credit."

## CHAPTER II

### THE TONE AND KEY OF CORRESPONDENCE

BY FORREST CRISSEY

Key up your business correspondence. Give it the tone and quality—in fact, the tone-quality—that you wish to have associated with your house in the minds of your best patrons. There are business houses whose letters never lack a certain distinction and character, no matter from what department they come. You know these letters are dictated by several different individuals, but there is a "strong family likeness" running through the whole correspondence. How does this happen? It doesn't happen. Whenever you see this symptom, be sure that it implies a deliberate, persistent, and intelligent effort which has very likely involved the employment of experts and specialists in this particular line of business effort. There is no possibility of imparting this peculiar tone, quality, and literary distinction to the letters sent out by the various departments of a commercial and industrial house without deliberate design and intelligent and systematic effort. This is one of the things which do not "happen;" it comes only as a result of a high order of business organization; it is one of the finer products of that process which we call modern business methodizing.

So apparent must be the importance of this branch of business systematization that scarcely a word of argument is needed to enforce its necessity. Very recently a large wholesale merchant said to me: "I have

recently been obliged to discharge the head of my credit department—my confidential man. He is honest, conservative, and shrewd, but recently I have been awakened to the fact that his incapacity to write a letter which does not leave a sting, a chill, or at least a sense of lofty indifference is hurting my business more than would some downright reckless blunders. When he writes a letter granting a good customer a larger line of credit he gives it a twist that somehow makes that customer wished he hadn't asked for credit and thus placed himself under added obligations. And if he refuses to meet the request for such a favor the refusal is so put that it seems a studied effort to conceal a strong unwillingness to give any credit at all. Yet this man has always considered himself an adept in letter writing—and for a time he completely hypnotized me into that view. But at last the steady withdrawal of patronage and the occasional outspoken retorts which his letters provoked forced upon me a recognition of the real condition of affairs. Then I went out after a man who could write a business letter that had just the right ring to it; that was neither so sloppy that it sounded hypocritical or so stiff and stilted that there was no tone of good hearty business friendliness in it. I have found him. He comes high, but the difference in results is remarkable. Of course, there are other things required than this form of literary ability—if that's what you'd call it. He must have business experience, business judgment and all the other cardinal business virtues; but the addition of this peculiar capacity to write business letters that hit the mark is a rare gift and makes him a star man."

**Importance of Tact and Tone**

Also I recall that Mr. Harlow N. Higinbotham

once said to me: "A good writer of business letters is one of the most difficult of men to find—and there is no department of a business in which he can do so much mischief as in the credit department. Here it becomes necessary constantly to deny favors to the very men from whom you must expect continued patronage. Therefore, the manner of the denial must, in large measure, determine the friendliness or unfriendliness with which the denial is received. Again, it becomes necessary to have your letter give the impression of unyielding firmness while at the same time it does not wound or antagonize. In a word, here is a department of business in which it is imperative that the finest shadings of meaning shall be deftly and accurately conveyed."

**Demand for a "General Literary Counsel"**

But how is the business man to go about getting his correspondence keyed up to a proper pitch? Once more the threadbare expression must be used: "This is the age of specialists," of consulting experts of all kinds. The practice on the part of progressive business houses of employing a "general literary counsel" as they employ a "general solicitor" or a "consulting engineer" is becoming more and more common.

One of the most valuable services to be rendered by this latest recruit to the ranks of the modern experts is that of keying up the correspondence of the house into a harmonious and consistent whole. This is done mainly by sets of letters carefully prepared to meet representative conditions which are presented in the letters handled by each department head and correspondence clerk. First the expert must get a clear and intelligent idea of the situation as viewed by the correspondents or patrons of the house; then he must grasp the actual conditions

**The Need of Uniformity and Personality**

and the manner in which they should be presented. He then prepares a set of letters which are not intended slavishly to be followed by the correspondence clerk, but will give him the key in which the letter should be pitched. Paragraphs and sentences may be used just as given in the form, but there must always be an introduction of these individual details necessary to give the personal quality to the communication. The difference in the correspondence of a house which has been brought up to proper pitch by a sound correspondence expert and that of a house which has let this matter "take care of itself" is astonishing.

This movement in the matter of securing a higher quality of house correspondence is not a "fancy fad" of business "cranks;" it is a part of the general movement for better system in every branch and department of business. The services of the "literary counsel" will sometime be as much a matter-of-course requirement as are those of the auditor or the systematizer.

Not long ago I entered the private office of a Chicago bank president whose name is known throughout the country. He was reviewing the "carbons" of the letters which had been sent out from his office. This he did for the purpose of making an intelligent analysis of his correspondence as a whole that he might make deductions and rules that would operate to give the volume of his future outgoing letters a higher quality. Here is a task to which almost every business man may profitably dedicate not an hour but a day.

Two classes of business communications demand especial care and should have the conscientious attention of every executive. These are letters of conciliation and letters of expansion. The correspondence clerks who are intrusted with the responsibility of writ-

ing letters dealing with complaints should not only be men of conciliatory temperament, but they should also know how to express themselves in a way that will make this attitude felt in the letters themselves. But even this is not sufficient, especially in large establishments, where hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of such letters are sent out every month. Each correspondence clerk should be furnished with forms containing expressions skillfully framed to cover, in a general way, the various kinds of complaints.

**Two Important Classes of Communications**

Or, to again repeat the expression used in this article, he should have guide letters that will pitch the key in which his answers are to be made. Thousands of dollars in good business are each year diverted from almost every large house because of failure to handle correspondence relating to complaints in a thoroughly diplomatic manner.

# CHAPTER III

## THE MECHANICAL MAKE-UP OF THE LETTER

BY GLENN S. NOBLE

*President, National Concrete Machinery Company*

The most important part of a letter is the thought that it expresses; the ideas which it communicates. The subordinate part—and hence the one often slighted—though properly of great importance, is the dress or clothing of the ideas which the letter conveys. This constitutes mechanical make-up.

The relation between the thought of a letter and its mechanical make-up may be shown by quoting the words of a western railway president known as a fluent letter writer, in speaking of the poorly-written communications of a certain line:

"By far the largest part of the letters coming to my office show that the writers pay too little attention to the mechanical side of letter-writing. This is as though a railway should pay great attention to its managerial heads—the brains of the company—and neglect the right-of-way and rolling stock. While the management would be planning fast runs and satisfied passengers the road-bed would be so poor and the coaches so ancient as to preclude the possibility of either.

"Just as it is possible to have the mechanical side of a railway system stand in the way of effective railroading, so it is possible for the mechanical side of letter-writing to shut out all possibility of results in business correspondence."

It is conceded, too, by every competent authority that the appearance of anything has greatly to do with its success. An excellent example of this fact is its weight in salesmanship, where the efficacy of a sale depends heavily upon the appearance of the salesman, the appearance of his proposition, and the appearance of the goods he sells.

**The Motive of the Letter**

Now the object of every letter, it is true, is not to sell, but few are the letters which are written, the object of which is not to get something done. This motive is the one which brings the letter into being and is the reason for its existence. There is something to be done, and the letter is the most economical means of effecting it. This result will be best furthered by the proper clothing and presentation of the thought, and this presentation, this dress, is the sum total of the elements which constitute mechanical make-up.

The logical treatment of mechanical make-up is that taking it up along the line of its origin and development, that is, from the time the letter is dictated to the time it reaches the reader. But this, though logical, slights the most important consideration, the fact that it is the impression upon the mind of the reader that is the objective point. The effect upon the reader, how such effect is made—in other words, the continuous operation of the *reader's,* not the *writer's* mind—is therefore first considered.

The written communication first affects the reader's mind through one of two sources:

(1) The letter itself.

(2) The envelope.

By far the largest percentage of impressions will be made by the letter itself. This is the result of busi-

ness organization and routine—and is partly due to the fact that the commercial letter is carefully filed and made a matter of record for subsequent business transactions.

Usual business organization and routine provide for the handling of incoming mail as follows:

**Incoming Mail—How Handled**

Mail—except that marked personal—is opened by a clerk and sorted for the various departments. In some houses the rule is that mail for the various departments shall go to such department when the nature of the letter can be determined by the envelope, there to be opened. The rule most in effect is one that "All communications shall be addressed to the Company, not to any member thereof." This means that all Company mail will be opened by the receiving clerk, the proper notations made upon it, and then be distributed to the various departments.

This means that the department head—the one for whom the letter is designed—sees the letter first. From it he gathers his first impression of the writer. It is the starting point for the train of thought which governs his business relations with the person or firm sending out the communication.

**Differences in Opening Mail**

In small houses, particularly those in the country, it is one of the prerogatives of the manager himself to open the mail. Some men even take a childish delight in performing this operation, studying carefully the outside of the envelopes before they are opened and otherwise spending considerable time at this simple employment. There is, it is no more than fair to state, a small class of old-time, successful business men who consider it an excellent training to "size up" the mail before opening it,

and see how nearly they can come to judging the contents, the sender, or the remittances by observing the envelopes. Then, too, many managers have old-fashioned notions about opening mail, and believe that a better check is kept on the business by attending to that part of it themselves. These two classes represent those who regard a communication as sacred to the addressee and such men often let mail pile up during an enforced absence instead of having it opened and that routine work which might be attended to by an employé, disposed of. A small mail, however, can be passed through a manager's hands, if he wishes it to, and he will in all probability feel better satisfied of his check on the business if he opens it himself. The usual accompaniment of such a course is that such men give undue weight to any written communication and are liable to regard it for what it *says,* rather than what it is *worth,* drawing wrong conclusions accordingly.

If the manager or department head opens the mail he gets his first impression from the envelope, and all that is said as regards balance, display, and the like as pertaining to the letter applies with equal force to the envelope.

In many houses it is often the rule that the envelope itself be attached to the letter. This is for several reasons.

The most important reason in the average modern business doing extensive advertising is the posting and checking of the advertising key. This key should be as short as possible and the usual key is, "For desk A," "Department A," or some similarly concise wording.

The tendency of the modern addressee is to place

the key on the lower left-hand corner of the envelope and omit it in the introduction to the letter. This key should be checked either as the mail is opened or as the letter is answered; in either case it is well to have the envelope for posting or checking the keying, or for both.

Keying Incoming Mail

The next important reason is that the postmark may be of value in determining the place or date of mailing of the letter. This is of particular use in the complaint department. Often a letter is written ordering goods and by someone's inadvertence does not get mailed for several days. The postmark shows this and enables the complaint to be handled to advantage.

The postmark, too, often has a distinct legal value, and the trouble that is necessitated by attaching the envelope to the letter and keeping it in the file, is more than repaid, if postmark information is ever called for. Proof of this is constantly coming up in court, when it is necessary to prove the time of mailing a letter making a contract, giving an order, or giving required notification, and covering similar legal points. The expense of caring for the envelopes of a large business may be more than repaid by the legal value of one postmark in a suit.

To reduce the filing space the envelope may be split on three sides thus saving one thickness and making it fit better in the files. Later it can be discarded.

Now comes the true reason—from the standpoint of mechanical make-up—for the saving of the envelope. This is at once the ethical and the broad, business reason. A letter may be well gotten up, clean, neat, and otherwise in good shape and yet so hastily folded and enclosed in the envelope that it does not carry out the first favorable effect. This gives a line upon the

firm sending it, as it shows that their business organization is weak in at least one point, and this may be valuable information, especially in a letter coming from a competitor. Many men have ability for business organization only so far. They are able to dictate a good business letter, but the broadness necessary to get that letter advantageously before the recipient, observing every mechanical detail, is lacking. In other words they are good on the start—dictation; poor on the finish—the mechanical appearance of the folded letter, enclosures, and envelope.

Where letters are coming in from houses whose credit is often under consideration, the deduction to be made from a distinctive envelope as against a sloppy one is of real worth to the credit man, if not to the other departments.

Business stationery now inclines towards the simple and the envelope should match the paper and present on the whole a distinctive appearance. In many lines, as those dealing with the fashionable classes only, or with womenkind, this distinctive envelope is a necessity, certain firms even going so far as to put the address in modish Italian handwriting.

Whatever is to be the fate of the envelope, whether it is opened by a clerk and thrown in the waste basket, or preserved with the communication it enclosed, it is a strong point for general advertising purposes, if for no other, to make the outside dress of a letter the best possible.

The address should of course balance upon the page. (The matter of balances is taken up further on in detail.) The corner card, whether in the upper left-hand corner or transferred by style to the flap, should be business-

**The Envelope**

like, and distinctive. The paper, too, should be in keeping with the business of which the letter is an important part, almost always matching the letterhead.

Commencing with the letter proper, which is nothing more or less than the dress of the ideas which the writer wishes to convey, first comes the problem of balance.

Balance properly belongs to typographical display. Not one letter-writer in a hundred gives it any thought, as coming within the province of the technical side of letter writing.

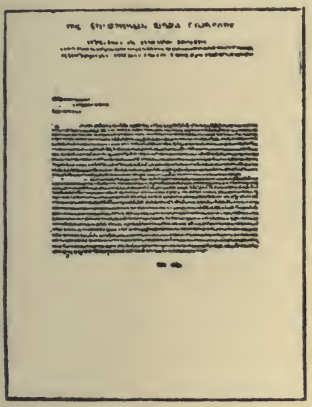


Figure I

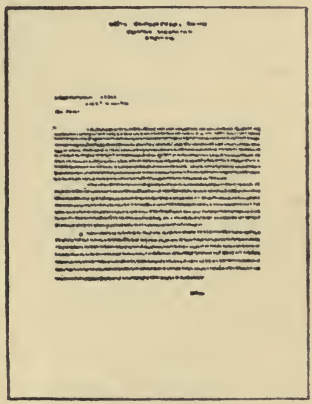


Figure II

The artistic laws of balance, which are the same whether applied to a title page, an ad, or a letter, simply provide that when the production is viewed as a whole, that the darks must be disposed upon the page so as to leave comparatively uniform margins of light around them. This is shown by the accompanying cuts.

Figure I shows an improper balance of a letter, the head and body both giving a wrong general effect. A letter of this make-up, when placed at arm's length and viewed through the half-shut eyes shows plainly that the head of the letter is poorly placed, being the result of disproportionate size. The body of the letter, crowded near the top adds to the general topheavy appearance of the sheet.

Figure II shows a correctly balanced letter—short form. The heading of the letter being light and inconspicuously placed at the middle top of the letterhead, can be nearly disregarded, and the text placed squarely in the center of the sheet. This makes a very effective

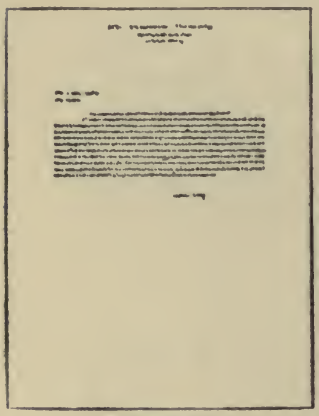


Figure III

Figure IV

disposal and is one of the neatest arrangements for a short letter that is to be found. The reason for this is very simple. The wide margin gives the same effect to the text of the letter as the wide matting of a picture, and an observer is bound to be pleased with the artistic

effect of the production, whether he recognizes it as such or not.

Compared with Figure II is Figure III, which shows the disposal of a short letter in a common, though incorrect manner. There is only one advantage coming from this style of disposal, it is that the remainder of the sheet can be used for a reply, but this advantage is so remote that it seldom or never counterbalances the artistic effect.

Figure IV shows a sheet as commonly written, having the artistic arrangement wrong, because of the fact that the text of the letter is run too near the bottom margin. This margin should be equal to or approximately the same as the white space at the top, as shown in Figure V.

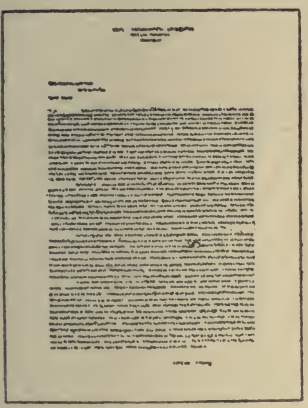


Figure V

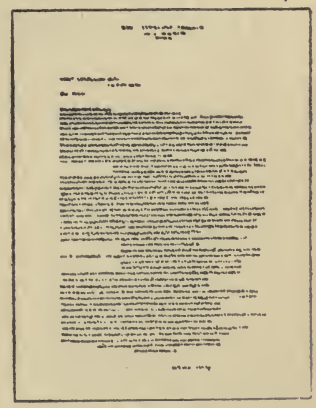


Figure VI

This matter of text margins has a great deal to do with the appearance of a letter. Besides placing—just treated—the most common fault is the ragged, irregular look of the right-hand margin. This margin

should be as straight as possible. Owing to irregular division of words, and the fact that it will take too much time to make the right-hand margin perfectly straight it is hardly to be thought of on general letters. In order to make an even right-hand margin the typewriter operator has to count carefully the number of letters in perhaps three of the last words and "space out" so as to bring the margin straight. This, as said before is not practicable and is seldom held to, even by the most finicky. However, it does not take appreciably more time to make the right hand margin more nearly straight than it usually is, and the bettered appearance more than pays. The ragged or saw edge is so common in business letters that it is one of the minor reliefs of business life to receive a letter which has an edge uncompromisingly straight.

**Text Margins**

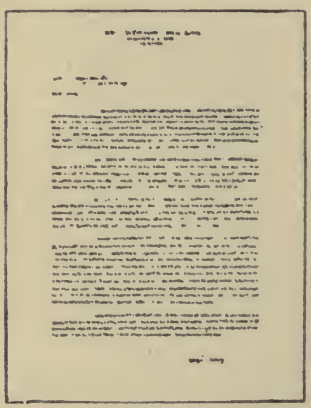


Figure VII

Figure VIII

It is here that the ordinary business man asks himself, "Is all this not too much trouble?" This may

be answered by another question, "Is it ever too much trouble to do a thing right?"

It is not to be supposed that a house sending out letters to a trade that will in no wise appreciate a well-written letter, needs to dawdle over correspondence to get it artistically correct, but it is business folly to have a large outlay for expensive stationery, competent help, and advertising to reach a high class trade and then send out careless letters which do not in any way meet the accepted rules of proportion.

An important point in the art of mechanical make-up is the matter of "group paragraphing." This is one of the most effective aids to display and harmony of the body of a letter that is known. Common as it is, there are still good, otherwise up-to-date letter-writers who do not use it.

Group paragraphing is effected by separating the solid paragraphs from each other by a double space. This not only emphasizes each paragraph and makes the matter more easily read, but adds to the general effect as well. People will do things which "look easy" with a great deal better grace than if they "look hard." The temptation to skip over a closely typewritten page with unbroken space lines is a strong tendency with the average reader. The solidly-written letter may even go into the waste basket. It produces a poor first impression—makes a poor start. So the writer handicaps himself from the beginning.

**Advantage of the Group Paragraphs**

Figures VII and VIII show the comparative mass effect of two letters, the first open and properly displayed, the second solid and improperly displayed. The effect is even more noticeable in the original size than in the reduction, as the reader can test for himself.

It is to be remembered in these days that mark the handling of hundreds of letters where only one used to be considered: when every business man is flooded with a continuous grist of printed, mimeographed, multigraphed and other processed letters from the follow-up mills, that the making of a letter "easy to read" is not a phase that is to be lightly disregarded. Nor is it easy to make the letter distinctive. To make it invitingly cordial at first sight is not solely the privilege of the dictator, but is also the prerogative of mechanical make-up. This can not be understood too well nor too thoroughly carried out in practice.

**Pen-Written Communications**

The pen as a medium for correspondence may not be entirely obsolete but it is painfully near it. The percentage of pen-written letters *received* by the house, depends to a great extent upon the class of business which it is conducting. It is not to be expected that a mail order house will number as many typewritten communications in its incoming mail as would a wholesale house receiving the orders only from a city trade. The percentage of pen-written letters *sent out* by a house is so small as to be regarded as *nil*. The pen-written letter therefore may be disregarded in considering letter writing from the standpoint of mechanical make-up. Where it is of importance is in determining what manner of man it is sending the letter, and consequently in determining the kind of reply he should receive. But as mechanical make-up regards the outgoing letter only, this too may be disregarded here.

The typewriter has been perfected until it is now an accepted fact that almost anything within the bounds of letter-writing may be done by its aid. Even landscapes—somewhat stiff in treatment, but still

scenic in character—may be delineated by the facile operator. But the proportion of poorly arranged, unartistic—and what is more to the point—unsatisfactory letters from a business point of view, remains at a dead level. The reasons why the average typewritten letter coming into the average office is not up to standard is often due as much to the lack of intelligent supervision by the department head as the fault of the stenographer. Were the "why" and "how" of the mechanical side of the letter impressed upon the stenographer instead of letting her work along in the dark, the percentage of ill-looking letters would be materially reduced. A valuable aid in this respect is a number of letters gotten up correctly and to be used as a guide in the mechanical arrangement of office communications. Form letters of fifty, one hundred, one hundred and fifty words and upwards may be prepared, correct as to arrangement, placing, and display, and used as illustrations of what the office style is to be. Better yet, a regular "style book" such as is in use in the printing office or proof-room may be made up and added to from time to time, eventually covering every point in office style.

**How to Get Good Typewriting**

It is a well known fact that certain colors will not harmonize when placed together. In fact their appearance is denoted by the suggestive verb "clash," as expressing to the eye what a discordant jumble of sounds does to the ear. Now right here the business man loses out when his correspondent opens up his mail and is greeted with the clash of two or more colors. He may not know that it is there, but it is just the same. One of the first opportunities has been lost. Instead of greeting the prospect or customer with the smooth,

**Color Harmony**

mellow, diplomatic tones of the practiced politician he is assailed with the discordant yell of the street urchin. It is as if a customer were to be greeted with "Hi, Bill!" instead of the insinuating, "Good morning, Mr. Brown, something in our line to-day, sir?" For color effect is one of the elements of tone, of expression of the letter.

Color-effect is the composite result of four factors:

(1) Color of stationery.
(2) Color of ink used in printing.
(3) Color of ribbon used in writing.
(4) Color of ink used in signature.

That these four colors should harmonize or blend is not to be denied. Because there are people who can not distinguish a discord in music such fact is no argument against harmony, and because the modern business man gives no thought to the avoidance of "color-clash" in his business stationery is no reason why such a condition should be continued.

The color of stationery, its texture, and general appearance to the eye is now given considerable attention, but it is usually from the standpoint of the buyer alone. In the press for "the distinctive" it is the tendency nowadays for each house to adopt a special color and style of stationery and familiarize the public with it, just as much as they attempt to familiarize them with their trade mark. In fact it does become their trade mark.

This so far is very good, but when the paper has been selected and turned over to the printer or engraver for his work, the color of the ink is usually considered of little weight. It is often left to this discretion of the printer himself and as his artistic taste is so the job is turned out.

By far the most pleasing effect is produced by having the paper and ink in different shades of the same primary color. This produces a distinctive effect and one not "worked to death" and does not introduce a new color as is so often done by running brown on blue, blue on yellow or by similar contrasts. Sometimes a job is run in two colors on colored stock. Two-color jobs should be carefully handled to be effective, particularly when other than white stock is used.

It is well therefore, not to let the pursuit of the distinctive go to such an extreme that it makes the stationery or the color of the ink give the slightest appearance of flashiness or gaudiness. These two qualities are associated too much with the circus poster for consideration by the conservative business man.

**Advantage of the Black Ribbon**

The third color is sometimes added to the effect by the addition of a different colored ribbon on the typewriting machine. It might be considered needless to state, were it not so often in evidence, that the body of the letter in garish green or purple added to two colors which already do not harmonize is to be severely condemned. Often the color of the ribbon is the only thing with which fault can be found, in the typewritten communication. The Departmental Service at Washington uses uniformly black or blue-black ribbons and all matter filed with the departments for record must be written in black. This is not called for from the æsthetic side, however, but simply to give uniformity and to allow the communications to be reproduced by mechanical processes, if necessary. One has but to observe the pleasing effect of letters put out by the government service to realize how much better general effect is produced by the use of a black ribbon in the place of gaudy greens or purples.

Personal peculiarities crop out as often in the signature as anywhere else in correspondence. The illegible signature is an every day occurrence, and now and then the freak signature, written in red, blue, or green ink makes its appearance. Sometimes this is honestly used as a means for making such signature distinctive; more commonly it is a mere expression of freakiness—the same spirit that leads a man to affect bohemianism in other ways.

**The Signature**

What has been said about harmony of color applies with equal force to the signature. Blacks are always standard and will harmonize with any paper and any ribbon and give an appearance of solid worth to a signature that is not otherwise attained. Of course, there are certain lines making legitimate use of freak color signatures, such as photographers or artists, and they may use with perfect legitimacy the colored signature. But it can have but little use appended to an ordinary business letter.

After the signature comes the fold. There are two principal kinds of folds, the long fold, where the envelope is over eight and one-half inches, and the short fold for the ordinary six and one-half inch envelope. A very neat fold to fit a No. 7 bank envelope is made by turning the bottom of the sheet up three and one-half inches and folding through the center, making the inclosure four and one-quarter by seven and one-half inches—a distinctive size for certain classes of correspondence.

There is no special rule for making the long fold other than to have it neatly and tastefully done. The short fold, however, is worthy of more care and study. In making the short fold it is to be remembered that the space at the top of the sheet is valuable. It not

only determines for the one opening the letter which is the top of the sheet, but also includes the most valuable advertising space on the page. To fold a sheet of letter paper for insertion in the ordinary commercial envelope, the fold should be from the bottom, so as to leave a top margin of one and one-half inches. Then the second and third folds should be made, both equal, leaving the margins equal. This gives a space approximately three and one-half inches by one and one-half inches at the head of the sheet for the distinctive firm name. This space should be utilized to the fullest extent. Used in this way, that area of five and one-fourth inches can do as much for the appearance of the letter as the remaining eighty-seven and one-fourth inches, if rightly used. And right use means, first that the distinctive design be in the right place, and second, that the sheet be so folded that in opening the letter that the design be properly displayed. It should first catch the eye of and be the first reading for the recipient. The old-style, careless method of folding is obsolete as far as modern business is concerned.

The Fold

Use of the above styles of folds presupposes that the sheet be that of a folio letterhead, eight and one-half by eleven inches. The use of a sheet this size for all business letters has two distinct advantages; it emphasizes the communication, which a skimpy sheet can not do; and better fits the files, besides being not so apt to be mislaid in filing.

Mechanically the insertion of the letter in the envelope is important. The use of the envelope is to protect the contents. The insertion should therefore be made so that when the letter is in transit and later opened the contents will be thoroughly protected and

not cut or torn in the latter process. Mail-order houses getting a large amount of mail often grind the tops of the envelopes, but the usual proceedure is to open incoming mail with the ordinary paper knife. The best general rule as to the inclosures is that they fit snugly in the envelope. The general effect should not be "bunchy," but tastily snug and trim.

The disposal of the address is governed by custom rather than by laws of mechanical make-up. The time may be when the reverse is true, but that time is not now.

It is plain that whichever condition may be, whether the thought-contents of the letter be poor, or good, mechanical make-up is of the greatest importance. If the central idea—the main thought—be poor, the value will be enhanced; if, as it is to be worked for, the thought be snappy and up-to-the-minute, it can find fitting expression only in suitable mechanical dress.

# CHAPTER IV

## COURTESIES AND CUSTOMS OF LETTER WRITING

BY L. P. HUFFAKER

It has been facetiously said that the time consumed in using the useless and meaningless phrases "Yours truly," "Yours respectfully," or even "Yours," in the complimentary close of a letter would pay the national debt, if rightly used. While this statement may be considered somewhat of an exaggeration, yet it plainly illustrates by its hyperbole, to what length custom will lead us in the use of the superfluous, the meaningless, or the inane.

Avoid stock phrases! Get enthusiasm and energy into your correspondence! Be original! These are the instructions that are hurled at nearly every correspondent by his manager, or which form the gist of many of the articles on commercial correspondence in the business press. "But what will Mrs. Grundy say?" might well be the answer. Will this estimable lady think you are trying to be smart or that you have adopted a yellow journal style from a pure love of sensationalism? For—far more than it is realized until broken away from—truly does custom hall-mark as of real worth only that which obeys exactly her laws. Lack of such endorsement often means the brand of sensationalism, and an institution branded as sensational in its methods is on the high road to bankruptcy.

So the correspondent finds himself with the two restrictions, to be bright, snappy, up-to-date—and most

of all—original, and at the same time to conform to custom and observe the courtesies necessary to conservative letter-writing.

Discourtesy in correspondence is just as fatal as discourtesy in speech—more so—when it is considered that the written thought is permanent. The unintentional discourtesy that comes of haste, or ignorance of form or custom does not work as much harm as does the half-hidden insinuation of double-meaning English. The former shows lack of organization somewhere along the line—calls attention to somebody's lack of observance of detail—and as such is laid more at the door of the incompetent stenographer than lack of tact and tone.

Most seriously, here is a problem worthy of more than mere cursory study. Courtesy and custom have prescribed certain laws as strongly drawn as the caste of the Hindus. From these no departure is permissible. What would result if it were done is not known, for few have been intrepid enough to try it.

Are the laws of custom as they are because of the sanctity which surrounds anything of age, or are they the result of development and elimination until the letter may be considered in its customary form as the highest expression of utility?

Yes, and no.

Some parts of the letter governed by custom can hardly be bettered—others are open to modification or elimination.

The modern authorities on business letter writing hold to the theory that a letter should be nothing more nor less than written talk; talk not strictly conversational, but one-sidedly argumentative. Now granting that this be true—and there is no reason to believe it

is not—the hampering strings of custom should be cut, or at least loosened a little, and "written talk" be allowed to wander more at will than is common.

Considered from the standpoint of form, there are seven main parts of the letter:

(1) The heading.
(2) The introduction or inside address.
(3) The salutation.
(4) The body of the letter.
(5) The complimentary close.
(6) The signature.
(7) The postscript.

Custom places the heading at the upper right hand of the sheet in the space immediately below the letter-head, though there is now a marked tendency to place it nearer the center than formerly. The heading consists of the name of the place from which the letter is sent, the street or room number, if necessary, and the date of sending. The name of the place is usually a part of the printed letter-head, also on some letter-heads the figures "190—" are in print, allowing the remainder of the date to be filled in with a pen or typewriter.

There is little chance for change or individuality in the headings. Some freak letter-heads leave a space for the date between brackets, some few writers conform to the English custom of placing the day of the month before the month, but in the main there is little change in the heading of the letter of to-day from that of those of twenty-five or fifty years ago.

The introduction, called by some the inside address, as distinguished from the outside address on the envelope, is the second part of the letter.

The placing of the introduction or its absence

from the letter is dictated by custom. In the business form, the name, street address, city and state, constitute the introduction, being placed at the beginning of the communication. In military, official or social form the introduction becomes the "name and address," and is placed in the lower left hand corner of the sheet.

As a variant of the "full" introduction reading,

Mr. Chas. E. Blake,
14th Floor,
Security Bldg.,
Chicago, Ill.

is the "short form" introduction reading,

Mr. Chas. E. Blake,
Chicago, Ill.

the remainder of the address being given on the envelope. This short form is to be condemned only as it gives a stepladder effect to the letter. Utility, however, combats this and it is probable that it will remain.

A novel time-saver as used by some firms in connection with the introduction is effected as follows:

**A "Short Cut" in the Heading**

The envelope is inserted in the typewriting machine at the same time as the first letter sheet and is so placed that when the address is written on the first sheet it will carbon on the envelope. This is an advantage in several ways. First, the envelope is written at the same time as the letter and a saving of time is effected; second, on filing the carbon copy of the letter or on copying it in the press it is positively known that the address on the envelope was the same as the address on the letter. Not only can errors in addressing be traced, but there is a permanent record of the address of the firm or individual right where it will be needed—in the copy of the letter.

Another idea which has been put to a somewhat

limited use so far, is that of using the "inside address" as the "outside address" by folding the letter so that when inserted in a specially prepared envelope having a part of the face cut away or made transparent that the introduction becomes the address for the envelope.

Schemes of these or a similar kind are constantly a-trying and no doubt one will eventually materialize which will dispossess custom to make room for economy and utility.

**Use of the "Direct Appeal"**

There is a tendency among certain correspondents of to-day to omit the introduction at the head of the letter, placing it instead at the lower left hand corner, as in the social form. Such writers hold that the first essential point of a letter is not to whom it is addressed—that is shown by the envelope—or by the fact that it is in the reader's possession. The main thing is to start what is to be said, to get under way. The apparent omission of the introduction strengthens the beginning of a letter by its oddity—its immediate appeal. Then, too, if the usual first paragraph of the letter is pared away or omitted entirely and the writer starts into his subject at once, there has been no time wasted on the part of the dictator in getting down to business and there will be no time lost on the part of the reader in getting to the important part—the real meat of the letter.

After the introduction comes the salutation. Custom prescribes that this be either "Dear Sir," if addressing an individual or "Gentlemen," if addressing a firm. Custom calls for the capitalization of all words in the salutation, though some authorities capitalize only the first word. The matter of punctuation following is not agreed upon; the comma, semi-colon, colon, and colon and dash being variously used.

The advantages of the direct appeal style are so numerous, so strong and so logical that it is a wonder that it has not been used before or having been introduced is not more general.

In the first place, "Dear Sir" is meaningless. The two terms are contradictory. We do not address as "dear" those with whom we have no better acquaintance than "Sir." Then too, there is too little chance for variation in the changeless "Dear Sir." About the only change is "My Dear Sir," which is resented as too proprietary by most men—so the correspondent drops back to "Dear Sir" again.

The first advantage of the immediate salutation is the ethical one; the advantage coming from placing the name of the one addressed in the most prominent place.

As the letter is opened the recipient glances at the letter-head and then sets himself to read the communication. His name is the first thing that strikes him. Not "Dear Sir" but "Mr. Brown"—the one generic and meaningless—the other specific.

Compare the two forms:

Mr. J. H. Ford,
227 Standard Bld.,
c/o Davis & Davis,
Chicago, Ill.
Dear Sir:—
We take this means of calling your attention to the fact that we are doing all kinds of printing, etc.

Mr. Ford:—
Have you ordered your printing yet?
If you have, etc.—

The comparative strength of these two methods is so plainly shown by the "deadly parallel" that more

reasons need not be enumerated in detailing the advantages of this style.

The style above places the salutation on a separate line followed by the punctuation. Extremists use the following:

Mr. Smith, your courteous suggestion of April 15th will receive our immediate attention.

Too slavish adherence to this last style loses by its lack of the personal element when addressed to "the Company, not to an individual," as the following shows:

The Standard Co., the writer is at a loss to understand why you do not give our orders more prompt attention. Our first order, etc.

This is a very weak use of a strong style, as a "personal appeal" should above all things be personal.

The body of the letter, consisting of the text or subject matter follows the salutation. Custom prescribes much less concerning the body of the letter—if it be taken into consideration the importance of this part —than the remaining divisions. The body of the letter in the old standard form starts out with a preamble stating the cause for writing:

We have your favor of the 1st inst.

Replying to your inquiry of July 1st.

This serves its purpose when it acts as a "connecting link" between a preceding event or events and makes a natural step from what has gone before to what is to come. Another style of arrangement is sometimes used which is effective and not hackneyed. It throws the "connecting link" to the last of the main statement, as:

Your proposal to send your representative to consult with us on the matter of maintaining

satisfactory prices and avoiding rate cutting, meets with our decided approval, etc.

This in reply to your letter of July 1st.

Following the body of the letter comes the complimentary close. The complimentary close is a standing tribute to custom. It is useless, expressionless and has no excuse for being. In fact a less expressionless phrase than the common "Yours truly," could not be found.

The object of the complimentary close was originally for the writer to bow himself out of the reader's presence with a formal closing remark, respectful in tone, and saying substantially, "Having said what is to be said, I now withdraw."

That there is need for some such phrase is evident from the abruptness which seems to characterize interhouse communications when the complimentary close is omitted.

The full complimentary close is generally in use only in foreign letters. Such communications often end:

We are, Gentlemen,
Yours faithfully,

Meanwhile, we remain, Gentlemen,
Yours very truly,

These forms seem over-punctilious to the business man who drops naturally into "Yours truly" after having "said his say."

As to the use of the final dependent clause connecting the letter, a weak effect is often brought out by such endings as,

Thanking you for past favors, we beg to remain,
Yours truly,

or,

Meanwhile we beg to subscribe ourselves,
Yours most sincerely.

There seems to be great room for the genius who will popularize a style so rounded out as to make the complimentary close obsolete, but up to this time it has not been done.

Custom has prescribed but little concerning the signature and indeed more than one authority does not include the signature in enumerating the parts but stops with the complimentary close.

The history of the postscript is closely interwoven with the customs observed in reference to it. When the letter was a formal document—the event of a lifetime—it was necessary that any additions to the body be signed and authenticated with just as much formality as the main part of the document. Hence, the custom now rapidly being abandoned of affixing the initials of the writer to the postscript. Now, the postscript is deliberately used as a means of emphasizing some important point that would be lost in the body of the letter—probably on the principle that the hornet carries the sting in its tail. This is the important use and is one much affected by form writers.

**Use of the Postscript**

Such in brief are the main restrictions which custom and courtesy have placed upon the correspondent. American business men have never been hidebound as a class to precedent—only as the individual—who hates to break away from what has been stamped "regular" and "good business form" and been "tried out" and proved dollar-getting, the only and final test of the business letter.

# CHAPTER V

## BUSINESS STATIONERY

BY KENDALL BANNING

*Of The Banning Company*

A man comes into your office. He is a stranger; you don't know where he comes from or what he wants. You are a business man and accustomed to make estimates of your visitors quickly. And his dress—which is not the man, to be sure, but which covers the greater part of him and which may be presumed to reflect his tastes and to this extent his social position—offers one of the easiest and in some cases the determining basis of your estimate.

A letter comes to your desk. The envelope bears an unknown inscription or is addressed in an unknown hand. That letter comes to your office as a stranger. And before you read its message—before the stranger speaks to state his purpose—your estimate of your correspondent is to some extent biased by the form in which his representative first appears before you.

**The Letter and Proper Representation**

A business letter is a representative of the house from which it comes. It is as much to the interests of that house to be properly represented by the letters which it sends through the mails as by the employés it sends on the road. No house would allow its representatives to appear before a customer in unclean or uncouth clothing. The frayed cuff and the muddy shoe are as impossible as the straw hat with a frock coat. Yet the average business concern blandly entrusts its station-

ery representation to the cheap or freak paper and crude typography of the job printer, whose selections and combinations of types and tints are often as inharmonious as the celluloid collar and revolving dicky is to evening dress.

Good men with good propositions may come in rough exteriors. Good houses may offer good opportunities in soiled and penciled notes. But most of them do not, and as the man of affairs to-day is a man of quick judgment, it is merely a matter of business to take the least risk by conforming to modern conditions.

Taste in printed matter is not necessarily dependent upon price. A well known English artist once printed some crude woodcuts on odd bits of wrapping paper slapped together in the form of a folder which is now valued at a hundred dollars apiece. The cuts, the paper, and the binding were cheap but each harmonized with the other and the result was art.

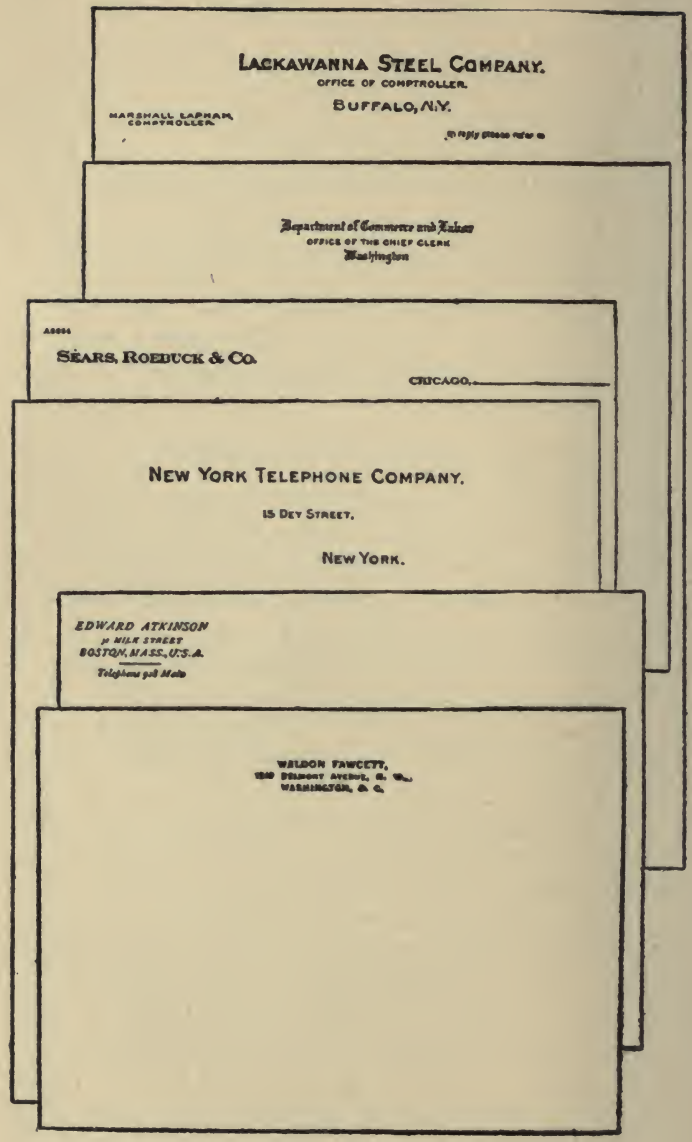
**Taste and Price**

You may blend the rich color of a Corot with the bold lines of a modern Gibson but the result will not be real art.

You may blend the tone symphonies of Wagner with the dash of modern rag-time but the result will not be real music.

You may combine heavy-faced type with antagonistic tints on glazed paper trimmed to unconventional dimensions, but the result will typify the sport rather than the gentleman. For the "dress" of printed matter may reflect the personality of its creator just as surely as clothing reflects the personality of its wearer. It is not a problem affecting the type alone, nor paper alone, nor tint alone.

**Oddity Not Personality**


LACKAWANNA STEEL COMPANY.
OFFICE OF COMPTROLLER.
BUFFALO, N.Y.
MARSHALL LAPHAM,
COMPTROLLER.
Department of Commerce and Labor
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CLERK
Washington
SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO.
CHICAGO,
NEW YORK TELEPHONE COMPANY.
15 DEY STREET,
NEW YORK.
EDWARD ATKINSON
31 MILK STREET
BOSTON, MASS., U.S.A.
Telephone 328 Main
WELDON FAWCETT,
1340 BELMONT AVENUE, N. W.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

It is a harmonious application of the rules of typography, made to conform with the personality which it represents. As a rule the best stationery best represents that personality.

Business stationery may be divided into three main classes:

First: the conventional and safe;

Second: the characteristic and good;

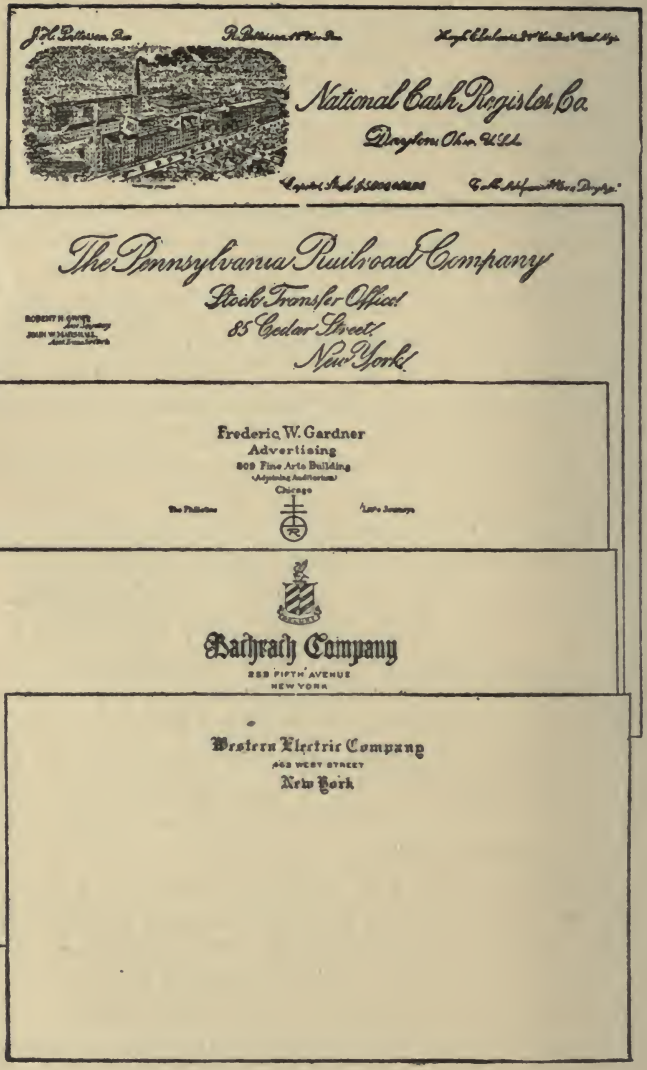
Third: the eccentric and poor.

The dividing lines between the second and third classes is often narrow. In an attempt to be "characteristic" it is very easy to be eccentric. Eccentricity in stationery, as in dress, is always in poor taste. For the average business man, the first road offers the least danger, for the simple and conventional stationery is sane and practical.

**The First Requirement**

Business stationery, first of all should bear the name of the house or individual and the address. To this may be added the telephone number and the particular office from which the letter comes. The conventional correspondence sheet bears this information in the simplest form, and the sheet is cut to be folded into conventional shape. Good examples of this class of stationery are shown on page 58. They violate no rules, they call no attention to themselves. They form a class of their own and need no comment.

A group of more pretentious letterheads is shown on page 60. Here some attempt has been made to call attention to the letterhead itself. The sheet at the top is a good example of a style that is generally popular with manufacturing houses, which often—perhaps for the purpose of impressing the recipient with the reliability of the firm—show a cut of the plant. "Here is


National Cash Register Co.
Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.
The Pennsylvania Railroad Company
Stock Transfer Office
85 Cedar Street
New York
Frederic W. Gardner
Advertising
809 Fine Arts Building
(Adjoining Auditorium)
Chicago
Rathbone Company
253 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK
Western Electric Company
463 WEST STREET
New York

my name and address and here is where I manufacture my goods," is the keynote of this scheme. Such letterheads usually bear the names of the firm's officers, the cable address, and other items of interest, and the cut shown is usually an idealized steel engraving, occupying considerable space, and tending to break up the general balance of the letterhead into a mass of detail. The same type of letterhead without the illustration is shown below. The effect is cleaner and more dignified. The other sheets in this group are engraved with the special purpose of appealing to that better class of people whom the letters will reach. They all bear the necessary information in unusual but quiet form and are engraved in unobtrusive colors on good paper. Seldom would such letterheads be sent out to addressees who would not be susceptible to their tone.

A still more characteristic group is shown on page 62. A particularly significant letterhead appears at the top, "United States Senate." The compelling dignity of this simple phrase, without address or comment, is as striking as it is impossible for any but the truly great. Below it appears the letterhead used by the various federal, state, and municipal departments, bearing, in addition to the name and address, the seal or coat of arms. A similar style is used by those of titular rank who display their insignia.

The four sheets at the bottom are types of the four excellent classes of letterheads used by financial institutions. It is naturally to the business interests of the banker to appear substantial and prosperous to create an impression of security. He embodies this idea in his stationery, which is invariably an expensive bond engraved in black and cut to prescribed shapes. Unusual departures from conventionality or color ef-

United States Senate

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Executive Chamber

HARRISBURG.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON

Windsor Trust Company

FIFTH AVENUE AND FORTY-SEVENTH STREET

New York

DESIGNATED DEPOSITARY OF THE UNITED STATES

THE NATIONAL BANK OF THE REPUBLIC

Capital $2,000,000 Surplus $700,000

Illinois Trust & Savings Bank

Capital and Surplus

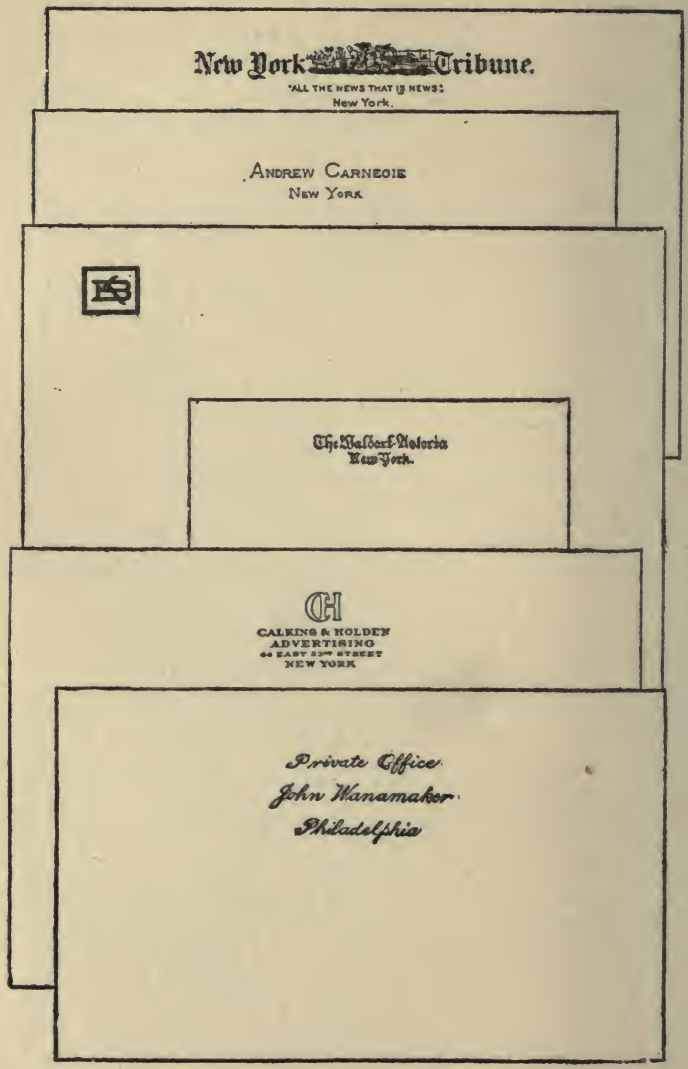
$10,000,000

Chicago

Farson, Mench & Co.

fects, indicative of a desire to attract attention, are not for him. Occasionally a financial institution which conducts an extended correspondence uses a medium priced paper with a lithographed head, as common stock, although the style conforms with the engraved sheets.

The group shown on page 64 shows the most "characteristic" letterheads although not necessarily not the most satisfactory of this series. At the top is the letter paper of the New York Tribune. No one who is familiar with the type and design on the front page of this journal can possibly misplace the source of this sheet; the whole tone of this letterhead connotes the house from which it comes. Below it is the stationery of Andrew Carnegie, characteristic not of this one man but significant because it is a good style of letterhead for personal business correspondence, for a lawyer, banker, broker, or professional man. This style often is folded into double sheets after the manner of polite correspondence paper. Below this is a design that embodies the monogram of the sender in simple form, and printed, more often with the address below, on a Japan vellum or hand-made stock. This conceit is used as the personal note paper of publishers and professional men whose correspondence is not so extended as to require more pretentious sheets and who desire some original but tasteful style. In number five of this group is an unusually successful head containing just enough detail, giving the impression of a harmonious whole. The name, address, description of business, and trademark are all included in a well-balanced group, being a study in satisfactory condensation. The simple, engraved letterhead of John Wanamaker is distinctive


New York Tribune.
"ALL THE NEWS THAT IS NEWS"
New York.
ANDREW CARNEGIE
NEW YORK
The Waldorf-Astoria
New York.
CH
CALKINS & HOLDEN
ADVERTISING
NEW YORK
Private Office
John Wanamaker
Philadelphia

as is the Waldorf-Astoria sheet, expensively engraved in gold letters below.

However unsatisfactory general directions may be, the following observations may be profitably observed in the preparation of business stationery.

Always state the name of the firm exactly as you would have it appear to the public. Your letterhead is the official guide to the spelling, order and punctuation of the firm name.

Always state the full address to which replies should be directed. If more than one address appears, emphasize the office from which the correspondence is sent by larger letters and a prominent location on the page. This point is often emphasized by printing or engraving this information in color. Never allow the wording to be so ambiguous that the recipient is in doubt as to the address of the office from which the letter comes.

The names of the firm's officers, its telephone number, cable address, kind of business the firm transacts and directions for the addressing of replies may properly belong to a letterhead for business reasons. Simplicity is always to be desired, however, and superfluous information should be avoided.

The sheet should conform to the regulation book page; i. e.,

The letter sheet should be folded to fit exactly into the envelope to which its paper should conform.

The address to which the letter should be returned in case of non-delivery should appear in the upper, left-hand corner of the envelope. This is the point to which the postal authorities refer for directions and to which the official stamp "Return to Sender" is affixed. Addresses given on the rear flap of the envelope may cause

delay and trouble. The envelope should be engraved or printed according as the sheet within is engraved or printed.

Always use engraved or lithographed stationery in preference to printed. An engraved or lithographic plate is made to conform exactly with the ideas of the purchaser and is not dependent for size, shape, or position on the limitations of metal types and rules. If, for purposes of economy, type must be used, adhere to simple faces arranged in simple form. Use heavy-faced type only on rough surface paper, never on a glossy surface. Plain small block type on bond paper offers the greatest possibilities. Hand lettering and designing done in ink and reproduced by a line plate, is inexpensive and effective, but good letterers are rare.

Colors on correspondence paper are seldom used to good effect; the results are usually glaring and cheap. When in doubt use only black. Excellent effects may sometimes be produced by combinations of black and orange or light red, which offer the greatest possibilities.

When in doubt as to what tint to use in the paper stock use white, which is always in good taste. Tinted stock is occasionally used to advantage as a "firm color," in which all the correspondence of that house appears and which, for this reason, has an advertising value in attracting attention to itself among a mass of other letters. Aside from this occasional, and often doubtful advertising value, tinted stock tends toward the eccentric except in the cases of paper dealers, publishers, or printers who have a purpose in displaying typographical effects.

Never use gold, silver, or other metallic effects on business stationery. Such effects should be confined

exclusively to polite correspondence paper and to the business correspondence of engraving houses who take this opportunity to display their skill.

Never use a paper stock that can not hold ink readily. Never select a stock that is not entirely serviceable on a typewriting machine. Never sacrifice the practical to the artistic in business stationery.

Never use a sheet of paper containing a letterhead as a second or following sheet. Either use a blank sheet—conforming exactly of course, in size, shape, and quality to the first sheet—or a sheet bearing at the top a line providing space for the name of the addressee, and the number of the page. In case such a sheet should become separated from the others, this notation will identify each page.

Never show on your letterhead a picture of the building of which you or the firm occupies only a small part, unless the building bears the name of the individual or firm and is used for advertising purposes. The public has learned its lesson from fake "concerns" which occupy desk room only, but whose letterheads show some large business structure over the caption "our home office."

Do not make letter sheets advertising folders. Never use space on the side margins of the page for printed matter. Correspondence sheets are intended to carry messages and should not be used for purposes of illustration or instruction that may be given more properly in the form of advertising literature. Letters may represent the house best by performing one function and performing it as directly and in as dignified a manner as possible.

As a rule the use of trade-marks on letterheads is to be avoided. Trade-marks are intended for use on

products and do not properly belong elsewhere except for advertising purposes. Make your letters *represent* rather than *advertise* your house.

To give rules for the production of original stationery is as impossible as to give rules for the cultivation of genius. But the rocks and shoals of mistakes of bad taste may at least be avoided by a reference to some of the fundamental rules which are observed by those whose business it is to know.

# CHAPTER VI

## CORRESPONDENCE ENGLISH

BY B. C. BEAN

**Correspondence English is effective English.**

**Simple, isn't it?**

Use effective English in correspondence and at once is accomplished the much-talked-of and rarely exemplified "art of letter-writing."

The form of the composition, the medium by which it is expressed, its mechanical dress, are all secondary conditions to the vital, life-giving expression of the thought to be conveyed.

The history of the world is but the history of the forceful use of language; the record of accomplishments done by the power of spoken or written speech backed by a motive—a power—a personality.

Correspondence English has been neglected by business men. And there has been a reason for it. This has been the result of the general idea that business and literature have been held to be inalterably opposed to each other. And there has been good reason for this view.

First of all the idea has been fostered by the so-called "cultured" writers that a classically perfect style is the one to be striven for.

Usually the business man holds, that the man who is finicky about split infinitives, can not write an ad that pulls, get out a telling circular which will draw trade, nor dictate a letter which can conciliate a complaining customer and retain his good will. And a

business man isn't going to allow someone who is so all-innocent of the arithmetic of business English, to give him instructions in higher algebra of it.

The fact, too, that the men who write the best letters, who do what they set out to do by means of correspondence, who can buy, sell, collect, or conciliate by the sole means of the written communication—the fact that these men are practical business men who have not made correspondence a theoretical study and are not specialists in English, has aided in the neglect of the study of correspondence English.

In general terms, the ordinary business man is afraid to "tinker with his English" or let any one else do it for him.

And yet the problem of writing good, plain, business-getting English is not difficult when two things are first considered separately and later fused together in a working composite. The first is, "On what does efficient English depend?" The second, "How can these things be obtained?"

Answering the first, all efficiency in speaking or writing depends upon conformity to what Spencer has designated the "principle of Economy of Attention." Stripped of Spencer's circumlocution of expression and applied specifically to business English this principle is:

**The Principle of the Economy of Attention**

Everyone has, at any given moment a fixed amount of power of attention. Therefore that part of this power used on the form of the message must be subtracted from the total power. The balance of power is left to comprehend the message itself. As words are used to convey a thought from mind to mind, those word-combinations are best which are most direct, as the least energy

will be spent on *form,* to the gain of the understanding of the *idea.*

In other words, "Make the message as plain as possible, that the attention may concentrate upon the thought."

This idea of considering language as a means of thought-transportation is not a new one; it is as old as speech itself. It is only the requirements of rapid transit that present the difficulty.

Now, when it is desired to transfer an idea from one person to another, the logical place to start is with the idea. It seems superfluous to say that the dictator should know what he wants to say, but the facts often point otherwise.

Not but he knows *all about* his subject, but he does not know about it from the standpoint that the one to whom he is writing wants.

Why?

Simply because in nine cases out of ten he has not definitely known what he was going to say, before he said it.

Even the simplest composition should be outlined before being written. If the outline is simple it may be carried in the mind; if not, it should be down in black and white. Then the correct development of the thought will be observed, the ideas will be grouped naturally, and, most of all, there will be no repetition.

Different writers have different methods. Some blue-pencil every statement in the letter to which they wish to reply, with the number of the answering paragraph, or an abbreviation or catchword designating the tone of its answer. Others make out a slip grouping the prospective reply into heads, and attach this slip to the letter before answering. Still others—a much

larger class—"look through the mail" and before formulating their letters of reply making every point and covering all the ground, call the stenographer and start to dictate.

The latter course is bound to result in a poor letter, often a mere jumble of words, simply because the writer is not working by plan, but by guess.

Every point should be thoroughly looked up, every idea should be in readiness for use the minute the correspondent commences to dictate.

That constitutes knowing what to say.

Then, bearing in mind the principles of economy of attention—that what is to be said must be got to the reader so that he can economically understand it—the second great question—"How can this result be obtained?"—comes home to the correspondent.

Words are the individual tools with which a writer works out his task and must not only fit the hand that uses them but must produce such a work as will give satisfaction to the receiver.

Perhaps the most common wastage in the world of business is the use of long words where short ones would do better. The history of the English language has been a record of the fight between the plain words of the plain people—the democrats of the dictionary, homely, simple, and direct—and the stilted, redundant, roundabout terms of the leisure class.

Imagine an army made up of fifty per cent generals, colonels, captains, and lieutenants! Who would do the fighting?

Still many a business man to-day sends out his letters just as badly over-officered, with a disproportionate number of officers—Latin words—to the total of fighting men—Anglo-Saxon words.

This form of wastage, coupled with the use of technical terms which the reader does not thoroughly understand—though perfectly intelligible to the writer—is one that offers a great opportunity to the man whose style is not too firmly fixed. For if he will dictate a small bunch of letters and then carefully go over them, cutting out every big word wherever possible and putting a smaller, more meaty one in its place and note the gain in strength that is made, he will become an immediate convert to the efficacy of the small word in the business letter, with a proportionate gain in results.

**Replacing Big Words By Small Ones**

The importance of the Anglo-Saxon words—the fighting men—can not be made too strong. The use of the word is to build the sentence, and the object of the sentence is to express thought. Further than this the business sentence desires to effect something. The ordinary sentence makes a statement and it is through. But the business sentence must describe, convince, sell, conciliate.

How this is done may defy analysis. More than this it usually *does*.

When a letter is read and stands out from its fellows because it is convincing, in the analysis of the causes which have brought that conviction the very reason that produced that effect is bound to be lost.

This is because it is impossible to dissect style.

One man is convinced only by wordy, eloquent claims, strong pretentions, that style of dissertation in which the writer figuratively shouts and hammers the pulpit until the dust flies.

Another man is convinced by the smooth, oily, insinuating mode of speech in which the writer worms his way in the confidence of his audience in the half-

apologetic manner of the professional politician soliciting a doubtful vote.

Still a third man is convinced only by a fair, square, straight-from-the-shoulder talk which does not mince matters and calls a spade a spade.

Take the same central thought, the same identical idea and dress it out according to different styles and note the result. Sonorous, classic Bostonese interspersed with Greek and Latin quotations, moving grandly on like the majestic flow of the Mississippi, is one extreme; jolty, jerky, rag-time American of the Chamberlain cowboy is the other.

There are almost as many kinds of written English as there are people to write. Just as a man has a distinctive way of thinking, moving, walking—so each writer has similarly his manner of expressing himself in English.

But scarcely anyone retains this natural method of writing. Nearly everyone has in mind a style to be imitated. The kinds of English written number hundreds, though many of these may be brought into a relatively small number of groups.

**Literary English**

Literary English is the English of the schools and colleges. Precise, grammatically perfect, written for the most part by men trained to observe the traditions of the language at whatever cost, it is the first style that influences the letter writer, being the style that he is taught in his early school days, when the mind is in its formative stage and still retentive of early impressions.

But literary English usually lacks life. It is the freight of thought when the business man needs the limited—a slow moving train having too many characteristics of the ox-caravan.

In the last decade a form of writing has sprung into prominence that is commonly known as advertising English. This has undergone many modifications and has many different styles. The prevailing idea nowadays especially among those who are not familiar with the subject, is that advertising English is nothing more nor less than "smart," snappy English. This comes from the fact that the advertisers who get the best results—results which show big on the key-sheet and order book—almost invariably use the salesmanship style, not the publicity style of advertising English. This style treats the subject from the standpoint of the salesman and goes after the prospective customer in just the same way and uses the same methods as the salesman does in approaching his prospect.

Advertising English

And this, the salesmanship style—contrary to general opinion—does not lean so heavily on its "smartness" and snappiness as it does its logical arrangement of ideas. The smartness of expression is an *incident* rather than a *means*.

The letter—particularly the sales letter—is a personal advertisement. It too, must secure attention, present its argument and clinch what it submits or it does not completely fulfil its purpose. This is what the "salesmanship" school of writers contend, and there seems to be every argument to back the claim.

Advertising English is worthy of most careful study by every business man, particularly if he be concerned in the disposal of any product by mail.

"Newspaper English" is a term often used in a derogatory sense, though there is no reason why this should be. Newspapers are gotten out at a high rate of speed and the preparation of the copy demands the

services of a forceful writer who can write accurately and fast. Rapidity is the great essential, especially on the daily press and the English of the newspapers com-

**Newspaper English**

pares very favorably with that of more labored productions. The faults of newspaper English are those that naturally come from an effort to fill space—the use of a "padded" style and big words.

Constant reading of the daily press causes the correspondent to imitate unconsciously the newspaper style, but he seldom becomes master of it as he does not use it as much as the newspaper writer or under the same conditions.

A style of English that is the farthest removed from sane, logical English is law English. This style

**Law English**

is the outgrowth of the idea that to express anything in simple language was to make it understandable to the masses and consequently the services of an attorney could be dispensed with when it came to its interpretation. One has but to read the simplest thought translated into legal parlance and unintelligible law Latin to realize fully the waste, the cumbrousness, the futility of law English. If A wishes to deed B a piece of land, it is necessary that A has "granted, bargained, sold, aliened, remised, released, conveyed and confirmed and by those presents does grant, bargain, sell, aliene, remise, release, convey and confirm"—in other words *sells* B.

Readers of "Tristram Shandy" will remember how after taking several closely printed pages, to present Mrs. Shandy's marriage settlement, Sterne sums it up "in three words" at the close.

To-day correspondence English as in use is a hybrid of law English and advertising English. The cumber-

some, meaningless, and useless terms of law English are retained in spots throughout the letter. The salutation, with its "Dear Sir," the opening paragraph with its "We have your favor of——date and in reply would state;" the vapid, complimentary close, "Yours very truly," are all relics of law English, and the time when letters were events in a life, written with a quill pen, sealed with sealing wax and sent at a cost of twenty-five cents per piece.

**Correspondence English**

That is what the English of ordinary business correspondence is. What it should be is courteous, easy, expressive, and forcible language.

How this may be secured is what is of interest.

To secure correct and compelling language there is one sure method. This is entirely by the imitative plan. There are two methods of acquiring a foreign language, one by learning the rules of grammar, the other by imitating the speech of those who speak that language. The first is the artificial method, the second the natural. Take a specific instance: Suppose a busy man has always dictated his letters in traditional style, having been afraid to break away from this style, although he wishes to do so. To acquire correspondence English is almost as great an undertaking for him as though he were to learn a new language. He must tear up his old ideas by the roots and transplant them to a soil with which he is not familiar. He can do this by the imitative method, by using the letters of good letter writers as a guide, modeling his correspondence after them and producing a letter that should be better than the one which he imitated, for the reason that he has the benefit of the experience of those who have gone before and can build upon the foundation that they have laid.

**The Imitative Method**

Regarding an important subject one apologist says:

"There is a great deal of discussion nowadays going the rounds of the business press as to idea theft. The artist studies for a long time on a design, a letter, or it may be the turn of a word or phrase: uses it and has no sooner turned it loose upon the world, than some one appropriates this idea and fits it to substantially the same or perhaps another use. Disregarding the right or wrong of the matter, this is the way all progress comes. Besides there is truly nothing new under the sun and just as Mark Twain's jumping frog story is to be found in the original Greek, so there is very little newness exhibited by the so-called new ideas.

So-called idea theft has the advantage of utility, and is a direct example of the survival of the fittest."

To work out the imitative method there should be taken as a basis, the idea book. This book should be the receptacle for all ideas, whether original, "improved," or stolen bodily. If a particular style of stationery strikes a man as being adapted to his particular use, he should make entry accordingly. If a certain letter comes to the desk with the imprint of a master hand, and having all the ear-marks that stamp it as being desirable, he analyzes the production, picks out its good points and records them in the idea book. If a thought seems to be a good argument to be used in a letter campaign, jotted down and transferred immediately to the idea book, "it will come in play" eventually.

**The "Idea Library"**

Besides this, the letter-writer's library should contain a number of other works for constant reference. These will be all the more valuable because they are made up on the selective plan, representing the honey of business ideas culled from thousands of sources.

A scrap book for letters, particularly for circular letters, with the strong points underlined and marked up, is an excellent guide. In these days of form letters a hundred excellent letters can be obtained in comparatively short time and should always be at hand for reference.

Besides the scrap book for letters entire, a paragraph book should always be at hand, made up of such paragraphs as may be used as desired. Good paragraphs—like good literature of all kinds—do not happen; they result after having been thought over, studied over, and worked over.

Besides the paragraph book a small note book for recording apt and forceful phrases is in order. There are phrases in the English language that express more than volumes—"fine, telling phrases that will carry true," every time. These should be used—studied—patterned after. Besides these are the "tumbled-over phrases, worn and blunted by excessive use," these should be avoided as shopworn goods. In the "thirst for the unhackney epithet" the little phrase book will be a ready fount from which to draw. The power of the language in fact may be said to lie in the aptness of the phrases making up the sentences. Neither do these phrases "happen." They are the result of careful study and work and are the greatest form of economy in forceful, compelling English.

**Importance of Forceful Phrases**

In the phrase book too will be noted two classes of words, those "hot from the verbal foundry" and those "exhausted by hard work." Both should be avoided except where a word has been coined or adopted as a sort of trade mark. In this case a brand new epithet may be made most telling.

Beside the phrase book, the general style book—more, however, for reference for the stenographer than as a guide to the dictator—should be a part of the working library. There is nothing sacred about style, but there should be uniformity in the use of the punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and the minor points that go to make up the best English.

Such points of style as govern the business correspondence of an office, systematically arranged will prevent a great number of commonplace mistakes when a new stenographer is hired, and even prove of worth to the dictator when some minor point is under consideration.

These five books, the "idea book," the "circular letter book," the "paragraph book," the "phrase and word book," and the general "style book," make up a working library of the most value because, being compiled by the man who is to use them they will collectively contain what he needs in day-to-day use. Then, too, they represent a wealth of incidental as well as direct suggestion.

Taking a series of ads, say of a concern starting business in a small way, these will show by their increase in size, the success of the enterprise; by changes in style and phraseology, the faults of English; and similarly furnish a wealth of information only necessary to be deduced to be of exact worth.

As far as the imitative part of the work goes this much of a library literally does the business. Think of the valuable points that will be gathered from the four corners of the globe by the correspondent handling thousands of letters weekly, for a period of years and at the same time religiously keeping up his library of good things!

In the commercial game, words, phrases, and styles are thrown among the discards daily and the writer must "draw cards" to get a new hand when he wishes to make a new bet. But a few days ago "style" was the word; "latest styles," "New York styles," "Paris styles," now "mode" has taken its place to be supplanted to-morrow by a word temporarily more "modish." "Quality" in its adjective use is now being hard-worked, "quality shoes," "quality clothes," "quality beer," and so on, and soon "quality" will be relegated to the ash-heap along with "strenuous."

Fashions in Words

The indefinite something which gives force is not to be subordinated to grammar, but rather should work with it; for a truth forcefully expressed gains if it be grammatically stated. But if a rule of grammar stands in the way of utility, the experienced correspondent sacrifices grammar nine times out of ten. A "rule" in the path of progress is bound to fare as in the hypothetical case of the cow in the way of the locomotive. Quoting Stephenson, "It will be bad for the coo!"

The forceful writer of business English has perhaps done more to cleanse the language of many grammatical barnacles than perhaps any other class of writers. If "to thoroughly understand" is more forceful than "thoroughly to understand," the business writer uses it, and the utility of the phrase offsets the wail of the purist. If "He graduated in 1891," is more expressive than, "He was graduated in 1891," "graduated" goes, particularly as the dictionaries authorize it. Shakespere, striving for stage-effectiveness was always willing to sacrifice grammar to utility. As the old sales manager aptly put it, "The diction of a Mil-

ton, unbacked by force and logic, won't sell Bill Jones goods, and what we want is Bill's order."

The letter once written it should be "tried." Just as the mason tries the hewed stone with his square to see whether or not it is according to specifications—so all letters should be tried by the try square of English and the try square of results. These two tests—when the workmanship is perfect—will coincide.

Looking at a letter from the standpoint of the outside person and not from the standpoint of the writer, the correspondent must get away from *his* point of view and get to the point of view of the other man. He must ask himself these questions:

Does the letter have the idea to start with—the backbone?

Does it impress this idea simply, forcefully, and convincingly?

And lastly, would it convince you?

The answer to this group of questions is the severest test that a letter can undergo before it leaves the writer's presence. And a pair of affirmatives makes "openers," and three "Yes's" a winning hand.

# PART II

# DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

# CHAPTER VII

## THE FORM LETTER

BY C. A. BURT

Every other letter mailed in the United States is a process letter.

This—better than pages of dissertation—shows the importance of the form letter.

The same conditions which demanded rapid processes in getting out all forms of printed matter are the ones to which the American business man is indebted for the form letter. The ever-present push for speed—for greater rapidity in the transmission of both spoken and written speech, has been met by the telephone, the perfecting press, the typewriter, and the form letter. The old, slow methods simply would not do.

Rapidity and economy are the things considered when a number of letters are to be duplicated. The average stenographer will get out from fifty to one hundred duplicate page letters in a day of eight hours, at a cost of, say, two dollars. In the same time and at the same salary cost, five thousand letters or more may be made ready for the envelope.

It is not necessary to demonstrate to the business man the necessity of a thorough knowledge of the possibilities of the process letter. Most mercantile houses are now developing a mail-order branch and those not looking for trade along the letter line are looking for some means to check the inroads of the houses that are.

Except in a few isolated and non-typical cases the

form letter alone will not get business. The form letter is a part—the most important part—of a business campaign by mail, the remaining elements being merely helpers.

To get profitable returns from a form letter campaign demands attention to

(1) The copy.

(2) Relation of the letter to the general business campaign.

(3) The mechanical side of the letter.

(4) The routine or working machinery of the form letter campaign.

The general rules governing the preparation of all correspondence copy are the ones affecting copy for the form letter. Good form letter copy is nothing but the most forceful and diplomatic expression of what it is desired to say as treated in Chapter I, VI and VIII.

As before stated, the form letter is or may be used in the various departments of a business wherever speed and economy demand. A business organization is made up of various departments bearing certain relations to each other, and the form letter, used as it is in each, is commonly of itself or in a series, a departmental unit—a part of the logical business policy. There is no department in fact, be it that of advertising—sales—complaint—or collections—but leans heavily on the form letter.

**The Form Letter and Other Departments**

Both the complaint and the collection departments are so distinct that the unital relation of the form letter to the department coincides with its relation to the general business scheme. But in the advertising department and in the sales department, when these two are interrelated —and in what extensive business are they not?—the

relation of the form letter to the general and specific advertising matter is seldom worked out carefully enough. Arguments are placed in the follow-ups that belong in the advertising matter; logical development is not maintained in the series—often being also lacking in the follow-up; promises are made in the advertising literature not fully taken care of by the forms, and the principles of unity are violated only with a corresponding loss of efficiency.

As a specific example, there is a class of this "lost motion" not often given much consideration; i. e., the relation between (1) the advertisement or advertisements which make the first appeal to the prospect; (2) the form reply letter and its accompanying follow-ups, and (3) the booklet. It is possible and always practicable to have the strong appeal, the main thought, the central idea run, like a thread of gold, through all three—this being in fact the keynote to the business.

In any series, as this, there is a place for the main argument—the big guns; for the auxiliary arguments—the small shot, and for the close—the capitulation and signing of the treaty.

**Sales Argument—Where Logically Placed**

Unlike the keynote or main thought, there is but one place for the closing point. It should not be weakened by repetition. It should depend to a large extent on the size of the proposition, where the main argument is made. As a general statement, if the proposition is a small one, the sale must be made or as nearly made as possible in the advertisement itself. The expense and time necessary to finish up the sale by correspondence eats so far into the profit that if the deal is not closed off by the advertisement there is an immediate money loss. Under these circumstances, what the form letter

and booklet can do, is to secure more business. Granted that the customer is pleased, as he is bound to be if the advertisement was a fair one, the form letter becomes a powerful means, going to a pleased customer, of effecting an extension of patronage. Indeed so valuable is this feature considered by many houses that the first sale is actually made at a loss, secure in the knowledge that the form letter going to an "interested list" will give rise to a relationship profitable in the extreme.

Where the proposition is a large one, the function of the advertisement is merely to arouse interest and get a reply—not an order. This means that the letter follows up the inquiry, strengthening the interest and completing the sale, the booklet being subordinate to the letter and being thrown in for inspiration, information, or good measure. Perhaps this class embraces the largest number of business deals, and it is in this class that the letter stands as regards importance, ninety per cent in a scale of one hundred.

When it is thoroughly understood that the correspondent must turn his inquiries into orders, it means that the letter is the thing with which to do it. The letter must contain just as much sales argument as the prospect will read and maintain an interest in. If the inquiries are uniform the form letter will be the uniform answer to each; indeed, if they are not uniform it is commonly possible to have forms in such number that nearly every possible contingency will be covered.

The advantage of placing the telling arguments in the letter, instead of in the advertisement or the booklet, is that the letter is much more personal than either of the other two can be made. Then, too, the

letter, if thought worthy of consideration at all, goes in the files and is available for reference long after the advertisement is out of date and after the booklet has been mislaid. This is sufficient explanation for the rule of many form letter writers to make the form letter a concise summary of the entire proposition—a confirmation of all the statements necessary for permanent record. This centers the importance in the letter and at the same time demands that there must be perfect unity between the three parts, the advertisement, the letter, and the booklet. In order to get this unity all three should be prepared by the same man or by men working together with a thorough understanding of just what territory is to be allotted to each.

**Value of the Letter**

It often happens that in preparing the advertisement that the copy-writer introduces matter that of right belongs in either the letter or the booklet. This is one of the worst forms of advertising waste. If it is the object of the advertisement to secure inquiries only such points should be introduced as will act in sequence in getting the inquiry, trusting to the correspondence to close. It should be determined what arguments are strong enough to bear repetition and which are to be the exclusive property of either of the three divisions of the campaign. There should be no inadvertent lap of ideas, or ideas out of sequence.

**"Idea Placing"**

There is a class of sales that can not be made by the letter except in close conjunction with the booklet. This condition exists where a large amount of descriptive material which would be out of place in a letter, is needed; where it is necessary to provide a large amount

**Supplementing the Booklet**

of inspirational matter that would interfere with the practical, hard-headed side of the communication. As an example of the first any firm handling a product that calls for an extensive description as complicated machinery or any product of that class the advertisement attracts attention, the letter gives the specific points of superiority and the booklet furnishes the descriptive matter.

Having determined on what the copy is to be and what part of the general business scheme the letter is to form, the next concern is mechanical production.

**Mechanical Make-up and Deceit**

The matter of mechanical production is more than it seems on the face, as underlying the mere mechanical details—the typographical appearance or composition, is the oft-discussed question of deceit in process letters. Much of this discussion has been along an unproductive line, as to whether or not the recipient is so befooled upon receipt of the letter as to believe that he is receiving a personal communication. This is not the vital point at all. The most important is the same in the form letter as it is in every other communication. Does it do the thing it starts out to do? Results —not deceit—is the test. The fact that a well gotten up process letter resembles in every detail the best class of personal communications, has led many to believe that because the one addressed believed that it was a personal, not a form communication, was responsible for its success, when it was successful. As a matter of fact, the successful results came, not from the deceit, but from perfection from a mechanical standpoint and corresponding other excellencies.

Mechanical perfection in the form letter is governed by the same rules as that of the mechanical make-

up of any letter. If it is to be an imitation of a typewritten letter let it be a good imitation. The "fill-ins" should match exactly, the characteristic uneven appearance should be prominent, the signature and a correction or two should be in handwriting and the production, viewed as a whole, should have that indefinable something which the personal typewritten letter has and the process letter so often has not.

The mechanical side of the form letter the best that circumstances warrant the working machinery of the form letter campaign is the last step.

Before a process letter is turned loose upon the world it should be subjected to a thorough "try-out."

The subject of "try-outs" is not thoroughly understood by the ordinary business man. In fact a large number have no particular idea that there is such a thing as a successful means of "trying out" circular letters. By "trying out" is meant specifically, in circularization, the act of making up and putting through the regular course, a letter or a number of letters for the purpose of determining specific or relative values.

There are several methods of "trying out." The best illustration can be given by the aid of a theoretical case. Suppose that a firm has an article, book, or device which they wish to place before the millinery trade. From their experience with advertising—or for any of other various reasons—they decide to circularize every millinery firm in the United States. There are in round numbers 10,000 people to be reached in this way in the United States. As a preliminary step they have prepared ten letters, by one or perhaps half a dozen different men. Each letter is given as much individuality as possible, and is as distinct from the others in

**A Specific Method Illustrated**

wording and appeal as can well be made. In order to make a fair trial the letters should all be made up by the same process as is to be used on the entire 10,000. If different processes are used on the trial letters, the same letter should be made up by different processes, as the process may have a great deal to do with the pulling power. For instance, if these trial letters are written on the typewriter, thus bearing the impress of genuineness, and later the same letters were sent out, plainly a form, instead of a personal letter, the difference in result might be marked.

The letters therefore, ten in number and written the best that it is possible to be, are made up in lots of one hundred for each series.

**The List**

The next problem before the "try-out" man is to whom he shall send the letters in order to constitute a fair trial. If the list is the United States list and he wishes to make a quick trial, there are two difficulties to contend with. The first one is the matter of geographic position and the second one a matter of time. If his list of names embraces the entire United States, it is possible that his proposition will appeal to the people in certain localities and be passed by by the people in other places.

As regards the matter of time, there is this objection: If the circularizer is putting out his mail from New York and letters are going to the Pacific coast, results will not be in in time to tabulate them to advantage.

To avoid all discrepancies of this kind, the ten lists should be as like in character as it is possible to make them. One method of making out try out lists is to arrange the whole lot alphabetically and take the

first one hundred names for the first letter; the second one hundred in the list for the second letter, and so on until one thousand letters have been put out. Another plan calls for more care and is usually a better indication of the relative values of the letters. This is where the lists are made up as near alike as possible; for instance, the entire state of Illinois is tried by the letters, and it will be no more than fair to assume from the results that the conditions are substantially the same in the remainder of the United States as in Illinois. Also the character of the different lists will be so nearly alike that the relative pulling power of the letters will be better determined.

**How to Make a Fair Test**

The letters having been mailed, returns are awaited for careful tabulation. If it has been stated in the letter that it is necessary to answer it within ten days, in order to secure a certain discount or to receive some other specific reward, it is probable that the worth of the letter can be demonstrated at once, as this will cut down the deferred replies greatly. Of the ten different letters it will be found that two or three are strongly in the lead of the remainder as regards results and the number of satisfactory answers. If one of these letters is far in advance of the rest and shows unmistakably that it is the only one of the lot that should be considered, the rest should be dropped and the circularization completed by the use of this letter. If three or four of the letters should prove to be the most effective, they should continue to be used for a second trial, if there is time, after having been strengthened by any means possible. It may be found on second trial that these three or four letters will pull about the same amount of business. Then those send-

ing them out must use their judgment as to whether to combine the arguments and main points in the successful letters into one letter, and try that out, or whether to use two or three different ones. Usually however, at this point, the three or four letters are combined in one; the strong points of each being taken and arranged and the entire list is circularized with this letter. Such in brief, is the method of "trying out."

**Influence of Modifying Conditions**

It must always be remembered that modified conditions hold good in the trial. For instance, in certain lines the difference of a few weeks makes seventy-five per cent difference in the returns of a letter. In other words, in order to be effective it must be timely. No matter how good the proposition, books can not be sold in summer time, and every other line has its season as well. Therefore one of the requisites of the trial is that it be sprung just as the season opens, so that there will be no loss in case it takes longer to try out than anticipated.

**Answering Inquiries with Forms**

Trying out letters in answer to inquiries, is a more difficult and complicated matter. Suppose that one thousand answers have been made to a number of advertisements in the various magazines, covering a proposition of say $50.00. These inquiries will vary in style, and may be rated from their appearance, as the first class, fair, and poor. First class inquiries will comprise those that are well written, the stationery denoting a line which is interested, and liable to take up the particular proposition that is being offered, and in other ways bearing that indefinable ear-marks which distinguish a good prospective customer from a poor. Class

two, the fair prospects, will be those that have the same characteristics of class one, but to a much less degree. Class three, the poor prospects, will embrace the curiosity seeking class who answer every magazine advertisement; school boys and school girls; those who want picture catalogues, and those who misunderstand the proposition and think it is a chance to get something for nothing, or is otherwise a rapid guide to wealth without work.

This gives us three distinct classes for trying out. It is usually not necessary to prepare as many letters on inquiry try outs as on a list of names. The reason for this is that the interest of the prospect has already been aroused. He has seen the advertisement and it is supposed is willing to do business. The letter then becomes merely a question of salesmanship, and it is not necessary to arouse his interest. That has been already done by the advertisement.

The inquiries as they come in are sorted as to the class in which they presumably go. If five different kinds of letters are to be used in answering, substantially the same methods are used as in the circular trial. The one day's replies are arranged alphabetically. This class may be either indicated by making separate lists or by making one list and marking them "A," "B," and "C," according to the class in which they come. Results are arranged and tabulated as before.

**Other Uses of the Try Out**

The try out is not limited alone to methods of finding out the value of circular letters. By extension it may be used to determine the relative value of various advertising policies. The comparative worth of specific advertising schemes and in general any methods that are capable

of exact demonstration. One of the most novel forms of try out is that used by a manufacturer who had his doubts as to the value of two kinds of advertising, the general or the publicity style, and the specific or salesmanship style, and the combination of the two. This manufacturer took three states substantially alike as to the conditions for effecting the marketing of his product, and thoroughly tried the three different styles of advertising. One of these he found very satisfactory and the coming season will use that style to the exclusion of the others. Similarly the try out can be used to determine the value of a circular campaign in connection with advertising; alone or in connection with traveling salesmen or canvassers. The variations are infinite and it only remains for the user to make the try out system as valuable as possible by fitting it to his individual means.

After demonstration of the try out and selection of a letter, a group or a series of letters the mechanical handling of correspondence, incidentally, the filing, and directly follow-up methods round out the plan of campaign. These are treated specifically in the third part of this book.

Such a thing as a faultless form letter does not exist, but perhaps one in a thousand have but few or minor errors. If the business man will check up his form letters by the following list—all of these faults being easily avoided—he will in the shortest space of time do himself more good in actual dollars and cents than in perhaps any other way:

Some of the common faults of form letters:

Crowding.

Improper balance.

Undue familiarity.

Wrong use of the P. S.
Trying to tell too much.
Sending out the letter unsigned.
The misuse of hyphens for dashes.
Apologizing in the first paragraph.
Using a rubber stamp for the date.
Addressing the envelope with a pen.
Asking for replies instead of orders.
Using a green, instead of a two-cent stamp.
Approaching the catalogue or booklet style.
Ending with, "Do it now"—forceful but worn.
Saying, "This is not a form letter," when it is.

Beginning the letter with "I" or "We" instead of "You."

Running the signature with a zinc or electro—a wood cut makes the best imitation signature.

Sending out the letter so as to reach the addressee the wrong day. Form letters to get the best attention should be received by the city man Tuesday; the country town man, Tuesday to Friday; the farmer, Friday or Saturday.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE BUSINESS-GETTING FORM LETTER

BY PHILIP W. LENNEN

"How do you mix your paints?"—inquired the art enthusiast of an immortal master painter. "Easily enough," was the great man's laconic reply. "I mix them with brains."

And the same recipe holds good in compounding the elements of a successful form letter.

One might as well try to describe the process of making a great novel, a powerful sermon, or an eloquent speech, as to attempt to tell exactly how a form letter is put together. For it is all the same art—the art of appealing to men; the art of fashioning their thoughts, wills, and actions to suit your own views and fancies.

A form letter-writer attempts to make other men think as he wants them to think—that's all he has to do!

And so does the author, the minister, the salesman—and every other mental wonder-worker—every other moulder of other men's minds.

There may be a hundred different names for it in other lines, but in business we call it salesmanship. And that's what a form letter is—salesmanship on paper.

"How do I write my form letters?" replied a famous sales general to my anxious inquiry. "I breathe a little real life into them—that's all.

"The type stick and the two-cent stamp are quite as mighty as the sample case and the Pullman coach. If the salesman's personality, the salesman's method of argument and line of talk sell goods in a personal appeal—they ought to sell goods in a personal letter. And so I put life—the salesman's life—the salesman's enthusiasm and glowing personality in every duplicated missive I send out."

But the pity of it is, it is in this very life and human interest—this vital personality—that most of our letters are so dismally weak.

**The Cardinal Weakness in Most Forms**

Almost nine out of every ten letters you read nowadays have no individuality in them at all—and do not even seem to pretend to have. They do not read like earnest, warm personal appeals between live human beings; instead, the cold, stereotyped printed circular tone is stamped all over them.

No salesman would everlastingly persist in using the same stock expressions, the same "I-beg-to-state," "regret-to-inform" style of presentation in his every interview, paragraph, and sentence.

Yet that's what your average form letter writer does. And even to such an extent that I verily believe many correspondents would literally acknowledge their death warrant with "Your kind and valued favor received."

The correspondence of to-day is nearly all in the same tone—the same stereotyped, stilted, commercial jargon. It makes no difference what sentiment a reply calls for—whether sympathy—cordialty—disappointment—surprise—the style is always the same, always as stiff and cold as an international protocol.

One might well think of a concern as an organiza-

tion of animated machines if he were obliged to judge it by the personality of its correspondence. And that's why I say at the very outset that a form letter without good warm blood in it, without life and gumption, won't pull ten cent's worth of profit—no matter how good its arguments.

Every form letter writer should dictate as he would talk; should put into his letters the same enthusiasm, the same intensity, the same earnestness and sincerity he would inject into a personal appeal—if the customer were at his elbow listening to his every word. That's the foremost principle in scientific letter-writing.

**The Qualities that Make a Letter Pull**

If a form letter is like a salesman—it should make its approach like a salesman; it should state its proposition like a salesman; and it should get the customer's signature to the order blank like a salesman.

In other words, a successful letter should do three things:

It should, first, attract attention.

It should, second, create a desire for the goods advertised.

And, third, it should turn the desire for the goods into a determination to place an order for them,—not "when I get to the office"—or "by and by"—but *now*.

A great many letters, like a great many salesmen, make their greatest mistake at the very beginning. Their method of approach is so weak—that they do not secure even a hearing.

There are a thousand ways of beginning a letter, just as there are a thousand ways of beginning an interview. But nearly all these ways can be classified under one principle.

The business psychologist tells us that every man

is interested in his own troubles. "Talk about a customer's needs or difficulties"—says he—"and you will immediately get his attention."

And right here lies the whole secret of attracting attention—of arousing interest and curiosity in the opening paragraph of a form letter.

**Points in Beginning a Letter**

The patent medicine advertiser knows that it is no use to talk to a man about his dyspepsia until the patient is convinced that he HAS this disease.

So instead of talking about "Doctor Fixem's Celebrated Elixir of Life" he first talks about dyspepsia—about the patient's disease. And so graphically and correctly does he describe the patient's identical symptoms, that the patient decides at once that he has at last discovered a doctor who understands his case. And if he understands the case is he not liable to have a remedy for it?

When you can convince a man that you actually know something about his affairs he is bound to entertain a certain amount of respect for you—even in spite of prejudices. He knows you are not a charlatan—he has proof that you are not hitting blindly in the air. You have carefully weighed and analyzed his demands. You have located the real cause of his troubles—and when you win confidence like this you have climaxed the first step towards an order.

But too many form letters begin at once to thrust their propositions upon you before they have established this precious confidence. They talk not about disease—but about a remedy you never realized you needed. They take for granted an interest that so far as you are concerned is liable not to exist at all. For instance, an advertiser writes in to-day:

I would like to show you our complete line of Morris chairs.

Now if I had actually decided to buy a Morris chair a letter like this might get my attention. But perhaps I had never felt the need for such a luxury. In such an event a beginning like this would invariably lead not to a sale but to the waste basket.

On the other hand, see how much more quickly a letter like this—an actual letter on the same subject sent out by a different concern—attracts the eye and brain:

What is more satisfying and restful to the tired, overworked business man than a soft downy Morris chair!

To be able to sink back into its pillowy depths with pipe or cigar and a good book at hand—what greater freedom from care and worry could you ask! What greater relaxation and comfort for mind and body—could you find!

I have the best line of Morris chairs in Chicago, etc.

There may be a little too much rhetoric and poetry in this letter—but at least it has an interesting beginning. And it gets your attention. The picture it draws is as inviting to "a tired, overworked business man" as a spring of crystal water to a desert traveler.

This letter does not begin by trying to sell you something. It does not attempt a tug at your pocketbook strings before it has even won your interest. It tells you in an interesting way your NEED for a Morris chair. And then it tells you how the form letter writer can supply that need.

In fact, the beginning of a letter resolves itself into considering the reader's needs, feelings, tastes, and tendencies first—and then telling him how you can cater to these particular characteristics.

If all men are selfish see that your letter appeals at once to the selfish instincts. If all men are mercenary show your reader at the outset the cold cash it means to him to read all you have to say. A letter for instance that starts off as a circular as does that I now have on my desk—"I can save you $3.50 a month on your gas bill" is sure to get attention.

On the other hand we quickly cast aside a letter that begins—"We beg to inform you that we have perfected a superior gas jet"—because such a statement as this is liable to be of very little interest to us at the moment it is read. I have all I can do perfecting my own goods without interesting myself in perfecting somebody else's wares. There is nothing that suggests any money-making chance to me in this beginning. Nothing that appeals to my greed—thrift—ambition or enterprise. It is stereotyped, commonplace, dry, lifeless. And into the wastebasket it goes.

After all, the point is merely an "A-B-C" principle of psychology. Talk about the other fellow and he is interested. Talk about yourself—and he stops up his ears.

But some letters fail even after they have secured the interest. They begin all right enough. They attract attention—they make us want to know more about what the letter-writer has to offer—but then they throw cold water on their good effect. They present the proposition so weakly and incompletely that no matter how real our interest in the article, there is no temptation to make the purchase. No belief is created

that we simply must get an order in at once or lose a golden opportunity.

These letters cajole us into listening to the salesman's story; but they do not properly satisfy our desire for information about the proposition. They leave us with a tepid, lukewarm inclination towards the article advertised; and a customer's interest and desire must be near the boiling point if you expect to get his order.

It must always be remembered that the great disadvantage of buying by mail—the stumbling block in the path of every mail order salesman—is that the customer can not see the goods. In every other transaction the buyer must see, feel, smell, or taste what he buys—but all this the mail order salesman denies his customer.

So the successful form letter writer should go as far as possible in eliminating these difficulties. If he cannot show us his goods he should at least show us a mental picture of them. He should so describe them—so paint their every quality—that we can form a clear mental idea of what he has to offer.

This is almost the whole of successful form-letter salesmanship. If we can only describe the goods so that they appear worth the money—if we can only make the customer see them as we want him to see them—then we have mastered half the art of letter writing. And the mere trick, knack, or feat of getting attention, our own common sense and experience will develop and perfect.

**Brevity Often the Cause of Poor Results**

But you can not create this impression—you can not so make your customer see the goods—unless you will take the time and space to properly describe them. The greatest fallacy I know of in connection with the form let-

ter is this broadly-held idea that every business circular of whatever nature should occupy only a certain set space—and never more.

Your proposition may require the investment of thousands of dollars—your letter may demand that the reader stakes his earthly all. Yet there are some men who will calmly insist that "you must say your say in such and such a number of words."

What superb nonsense! As though even your flower of endowed literary genius could write and write well by the yard stick or the stop watch. Everybody knows that brevity is the soul of wit; but when brevity is used at the sacrifice of good sense, clearness, and specific, definite description, how can it possibly become anything else but the soul of snappy mush, meaningless generalities, jerky nothings, and poor results.

There's no earthly use in sending out a letter at all if it does not properly tell its story. Better take a volume and make your point clear than force your reader to wade through five or six paragraphs without forming any definite idea of what you have to offer.

I have seen and read form letters twenty-five pages in length that were not too long; because they did the business; because the proposition was so big and unusual that it could not be told in fewer words. There was no chance for inference or deduction. The matter involved so many thousands of dollars that every point and detail had to be fully understood and considered by both sides before an order was possible. And because the letter was comprehensive—it pulled.

Tell your story in as few words as possible—but make sure above all things that you really tell your story before you finally stop!

Yet more deplorable, even a hundred times, than your incomplete, indefinite argument is the description expressed in a flippant, jocular, pseudo-humorous vein—the correspondence Joe Miller that simply must make you laugh to make you buy.

**Humor—Funnyism in Letter-Writing**

This is the kind of a letter that actually deals lightly with what it has to sell, that uses the very article it wants you to pay your good hard coin for, as the means for a frayed-out pun.

Not content with telling you what the goods are, in an honest, straightforward way, it must get in some ancient gimcrack about them—it must make their name or quality the butt for an ill-timed witticism.

Buying is no joke. No man wants to be grinned at when he is debating about the expenditure of a stiff sum of money. It is about the most serious work a man has to do—to decide whether to buy this or that article.

And you must take him at his mood—you must talk to him as directly, as whole-heartedly, as he debates with himself.

I have seen hundreds—yes, thousands—of good form letters literally ruined by just one flippant expression, one tiny attempt at jocularity, one untimely effort at facetiousness.

And the absurdity of it is, not one of these "funny" writers are ever able to definitely tell why letter writing should be made this miniature Puck and Judge game. Their only idea seems to be that it is the cleverness, the sparkle, the epigrammatic brilliance of a letter that makes it pull. Yet I believe that both you and I are still to meet a shrewd, hardheaded business man who is investing his capital for the sake of reading other people's cleverness.

What we want is the goods—not humor, nor genius, nor literature. A homely, honest letter—even though a little rough and crude—that really tells its story and describes its proposition is far more liable to bring in the business than the brilliant humorous effort that at best only makes us admire the writer alone and not the writer's goods.

But there are some form letters, which, even though they comply with all the principles described above, never really induce us to do anything. They attract the attention—they create the desire for the goods—but somehow we feel that we might as well wait until we get a little more money; or until business picks up before we actually place the order.

Climax

Such a letter lacks a strong effective climax—lacks some inducement or discount that would make us see the imperative need of getting in an order at once.

The principle of climax is vital—but simple. It is merely this—give the reader some proposition, some object, some argument—that will make him see that an order to-day is worth far more than an order to-morrow.

It may be a cash discount; it may be a premium; it may be a special offer about to be withdrawn. Then again it need not require any mercenary sacrifice on your part at all, but merely an argument that shows the customer the hardship he must withstand, or the profit he must lose every day he is without the article advertised.

A splendid climax—requiring no discount or premium can always be made by a letter that advertises a money—time—or labor-saving article.

For instance, the National Cash Register Company say to the merchant:

A thing that will save you money to-morrow will save you money to-day. And the sooner you get it the more money it will save. Delays pay no dividends—Act now!

and the retailer does.

Or they sometimes put it:

If a dependable bank should offer to give you 10% on your money instead of the 4% you get now —wouldn't you put your money in the new bank as soon as you could?

You wouldn't wait until it was convenient—you wouldn't put it off until you just happened to be in the bank's neighborhood. You would go at once. Because every day's delay would mean the loss of a day's interest at 6%. And no retailer can afford to throw money away.

Now you can't afford to delay getting a National—because every day you are without it means just so much loss in the money this National will make or save you—and add to your bank account.

Order to-day!

In other words the object of a good climax is to make the customer "get a hump on himself" and place his order in the first outgoing mail. It is the "procrastination killer" of the mail order business; the order stimulator that quickens the flow of sales and profits towards your cash drawer and bank balance.

"The sooner you use it—the more it will make."

But after you have written your letter so that you have given your argument and your climax—go

over it and cut out the unnecessary words.

**The Importance of Concision**

Because I emphasized a while ago the vital importance of telling your whole story—don't think I advocate unnecessarily prolix correspondence.

A good letter writer should count every word as a miser counts dollars—and should keep ever in his mind that each extra expression or sentence means just so much more work for the reader—places him just so much farther away from the paragraph that asks him to sign the order.

Get in every argument mind you, every point that will tend to magnetize the money into your customer's cash drawer. But be sure to state these points in as little space, and in as few words as clearness, naturalness, and clean-cut expression will permit.

# CHAPTER IX

## COMPLAINT CORRESPONDENCE

BY S. S. SMITH

The efficacy of the complaint department depends upon two things: First, the excellence of the organization of the department itself; second, the letters of adjustment which issue.

The specific principle stated above made generic is the one underlying all business. Plant, factory, or store organization must come first before the industrial units which keep it alive can exercise their varied and essential functions. No business of any magnitude can exist until the various requirements are separated from each other—departmentalized—later to be given over to a specialist—the departmental manager.

**Success in the Complaint Department**

The business personality of this man as shown by the points at which he touches those with whom he has business relations, determines the success or failure of the department. Now and then, however, a department is so systematized, the right road to follow is so clearly indicated, that the veriest tyro can not go far wrong. Such a contingency might occur in an accounting department where the systematization was so complete and under employés so efficient, that a department manager would find no new problems to be solved, it being only necessary to see that the daily work was satisfactorily disposed of.

Such a condition can never arise in the complaint

department. Here as much as in any department of a house, the personality of the department head indicates at once whether or not he be efficient, and whether the house is to be advertised favorably or adversely by its adjustment of complaints.

The reason for this is not far to seek. The complaint deals with *customers*. The house has invested its money to found its plant and established its business. It has expended a certain sum to secure the privilege of doing business with the customer. That customer represents an invested value to the house of a certain, definite sum, depending in amount principally upon the advertising expense necessary to secure a patron. He also represents a potential value to the house in at least two ways—expectancy of trade and advertising value.

A satisfied customer "gets in the habit" of buying at a certain place and will continue to buy at that place—providing he is—or thinks he is well-treated—for an average life of, say five years. During all this time he is doing direct advertising by actually recommending the place to his friends, and indirect advertising by being seen at that place of business, using that certain product, and in countless other ways.

To continue this relation is the function of the complaint department.

**The Personal Adjustment vs. the Letter**

It is outside the scope of this article to more than touch upon the personal adjustment. This is a matter of combined intuition, experience, patience, self-control, fairness, discernment, and a host of other qualifications, necessary to the proper and satisfactory adjustment of complaints made at the adjustment bureau of any concern doing a large retail business, dealing over the

counter or otherwise directly with the people. In this method of adjustment the adjuster is not confined to the written page, either for the information that he receives or supplies. By the appearance of the complainant, and the manner in which the information is given, he is enabled to judge of the fairness of the complaint, the method to be used in adjustment, how far to go in satisfying the complainer, and in fact all the information necessary to close up the matter satisfactorily and at once.

Complaint correspondence, on the other hand, looks to the settlement of just as annoying problems from the barest data furnishable, often being a bald statement of a fact written entirely from the complainer's viewpoint and furnishing little or no basis by which to judge the fairness of the statement on which must be based the adjustment. There is but one main advantage in this method. When a person has made his complaint—perhaps in a petulant or self-assertive manner—and has received his reply—tactful, diplomatic, and deferentially courteous, this reply has a tendency to bring out all the latent fairness of the complainant and is often followed by a reaction that leaves him with the best feelings towards the house, and, perhaps, actually feeling that they are to be treated so nicely that they too, must be upon their best behavior and not leave all the concessions to be made by the other side.

It is to bring about just this mental condition that the complaint letter attempts. "To work together in the spirit of fairness," is perhaps the best tone of the complaint letter and the one that is most efficacious in the most cases.

The reasons for the large number of complaints

scheduled by any house having an extensive business, are the outgrowth of two modern conditions.

"Nothing Claimed Nothing Obtained"

First, the idea that the patron who is uncomplaining, easy-going, and patient in his dealings with a firm, will always fare worse than he who demands his rights to the uttermost and demands them loudly. The germ of this idea is here: Great claims loudly made will certainly secure some recognition; no claims or those not emphatically represented will land nothing. Nor is this—it must be confessed—always a wrong idea. Too often the surest way to get poor service is to make no complaint when the service does not suit. Too often, also, do extravagant claims result in the claimant securing a compromise, where he is entitled to nothing.

Second, the fact that modern business relations are strangely complex is an ever-present condition favoring complaints. The customer in Cresco, Iowa, writes to a large firm in New York City, asking that a certain piece of goods be forwarded him. If it be considered at how many points there is a chance for miscarriage, misunderstanding, delay, or one of the thousand and one other things that may interrupt, or interfere with the proper consummation of this simple business transaction, it will not be thought strange that the complaint department of any large house is a large and important one.

Delay and Complaints

The ordinary customer entrusts his communications to the mails with just as much assurance that they will be properly delivered as though he himself were performing the work. He has a reasonable idea as to how long it takes a letter to arrive at its destination, and how

long it should take him to receive the order after it has been filled. This time having elapsed, he becomes anxious, and depending upon circumstances and upon his temperament he writes, to inquire for the delay, or does not. If he writes, his inquiry may be permeated by a spirit of courtesy, or it may be not. The letter of complaint may be deferential—particularly if coming from a foreign country; it may be good-naturedly humorous, or offensively radical, or any degree between those two points. In whatever spirit the communication is written, the reply, like the demonstration of the salesman, must be calming and courteous. It can not embody anything that smacks of the discourteous; it can not afford the slightest peg upon which to hang a further grouch; it must soothe down the ruffled feathers of the bird of peace with a promise and a fulfilment that retains the respect of all parties thereto.

Now, dependent upon the time that he has to wait for a reply to his complaint, hinges the success of the complaint letter. It is a known fact in mental science, that there is scarcely a crime for which the criminal can not find justification if he is given long enough time. At first he has a realizing sense of the magnitude of his wrong-doing, but as time slips by he fancies himself, if not the aggrieved party, yet in some measure justified for his act.

Now, whether the party making the complaint be in the right or wrong, every hour that elapses makes his complaint just that much harder to settle. Therefore, whatever kind of letter issues it must be prompt.

Many authorities on adjustment correspondence hold that immediately upon receipt of a complaint, a notification that the complaint has been received, and is being investigated should issue. The authorities

holding to this view assert that this letter or notification coming in immediate response to the complaint, protects the house in case there be any delay; if there be no delay it sets in action the smoothing-down process that the letter completes.

**Acknowledging the Receipt of the Complaint**

Other authorities, however, hold that no communication should issue until the letter can go forward, saying that the matter has been adjusted—the goods reshipped—the order duplicated—or the thing complained of has been entirely set right. Those holding to this view say: "Do not write until you can repair or make good the complaint. The complainer wants satisfaction—wants the goods; smooth letters are all right in their place, but their place is only when the goods can go forward."

There is no doubt much good in both views. The simple notification that a complaint has been received and is being attended to undoubtedly assists in conciliation, and, on the other hand, if a reasonable time elapses after such notification, the effect of any other letter not accompanied by the goods, is futile.

Just as there are two broad classes of advertisements, similarly there are two ways of answering every complaint letter. One class of advertisements confine themselves to simple, unexaggerated truths, depending upon the fairness of the people with whom the firm does business to respond to unembellished facts. The other class of advertisements are those exaggerated, semi-bombastic productions which claim everything in the hopes that a fair percentage of claims made will be believed.

**Classes of Complaints**

The matter of complaints may deal with the complainants from just the same standpoint as the differ-

ent classes of advertisements deal with the public. Complaints as they come in may be classified as "fair" and "unfair." This classification may be avoided, however, and both classes written the smoothest, most tactful letter that possibly can issue. The complainant may be cajoled, flattered, and bamboozled, all in the short space of two or three paragraphs. He may be assured, by all the living gods that it was through no fault of the house that the mistake occurred, that it is peculiarly unfortunate, because of the fact that the one addressed is included in the list of oldest, dearest, customers. The whole may be concluded by an unmistakable expression of undying regret, and a sincere promise that the entire establishment will be upturned in case such a deplorable accident should ever happen again.

**Telling the Truth**

As opposed to this is the complaint letter which confines itself to the plain unvarnished truth—stating it, it is true—in a diplomatic way, but yet so worded and so disposed as to give the impression at every point, of the innate fairness of the writer and the willingness of the house to make good any and all reasonable demands.

This style of letter goes alike to the "fair" and the "unfair" complainants. Those on the second list are reasonably sure to write again asking further concessions, or otherwise objecting to the settlement made or offered. They may then be dealt with more as the inclination of the writer directs for no reasonable settlement will be satisfactory to them.

Perhaps the correspondent should be master of both the foregoing methods of adjustment. There is a certain class who will be satisfied only with a large number of extravagant promises. They feel better over

a large number of such promises partially fulfilled, than over an exact statement of facts carried out to the letter. Knowing when to use one style, and when the other or when to mix shrewdly the two in one letter comes from the intuitive faculty that develops from constant application to and study of one line.

**Satisfying by Extravagance**

Complaints, classified from the standpoint of the causes from which they spring, fall broadly into the following divisions:

(1) Those complaints arising from neglect or error of the house.

(2) Those complaints the fault of the complainant.

(3) Those complaints the fault of both the house and the complainant.

(4) Those complaints due to outside sources or unavoidable causes.

It is a sign of poor business organization or administration, or both, when the first class is a large one. In order that the cause should be located unbiasedly, it is imperative the adjuster be concerned in no way with the filling of orders or the solicitation of business. Should he be, one of the two things is sure to occur: He will tend to be unfair in all adjustments resulting from his neglect, minifying them in a manner prejudicial to a fair settlement; also, the complaint letters being unpleasant ones to answer, they may be put aside and so fail to receive the necessary prompt attention. The expert—the specialist—is needed in the department of complaints and adjustments if for no other reason, to check unprejudicedly the department of sales and delivery.

**Complaints Showing Defective Organization**

Complaints unmistakably the fault of the com-

plainant call for a thorough, tactful, demonstration—not as to the guilt of the complainer—but as to the innocence of the house. It is less difficult to convince the complaining customer that the house was in the right, than that he was in the wrong, and this taken as a basis from which to work produces the ideal letter for class two.

Complaints due to outside sources are by the far the simplest of any in regard to the manner of their disposal. The only embarrassment is due to delayed shipments, in which case it is difficult to determine whether to duplicate the order or wait for the goods to be delivered. If sent by express or freight the fact that consignment has been made is universally recognized as a clearance for the house. The post office department—unless consignments are sent by registered mail—gives no tangible evidence of the consignment of an order and the excuse, "the fault of the mails," no longer constitutes a valid extenuation for non-delivery.

**Fairness in the Complaint Letter**

The general qualifications that make up a tactful letter, must of course, be present in the complaint letter, in order that it be effective. The one requisite, however, the absence of which detracts from it the most, is fairness. As long as the tone of the letter is just and equitable even the most prejudiced can not fail to recognize this spirit and will not have the persistence to stand out against what they know is and can recognize as right. Unfortunately the truly judicial mind is rare—and that is what the complaint adjuster needs. He must protect the house on the one hand and still retain the goodwill—where possible—of the customer.

System in the complaint department is as potent a factor for efficiency as anywhere in the business or-

ganization. Only through a smoothly-running system can any volume of business be cared for accurately and on time.

As an exposition of the system used by one of the largest publishing houses of the East, in handling their complaints, the following is given by the Circulation Manager of that publication, with the request, however, that his name be withheld:

"Our Circulation Bureau includes in its scope not only the formulation and the carrying out of plans looking to the maintenance and increase of the circulation of our magazines, but also the handling of the mail, the entering of subscriptions and the conduct of the general correspondence. At one time, the entering of mail and the keeping of subscription records were looked after in a department devoted to that work and what might be termed the executive part of the circulation work in another department. On the prompt and proper handling of complaints and general subscription work, however, depends to a not inconsiderable extent, the efficiency of circulation plans proper and we found that a more efficient and intelligent conduct of this part of the work could be secured by a consolidation in one department and under one general management. One subdivision of the Circulation Bureau as it now exists is that of correspondence and this subdivision includes in its duties complaint work.

**Scope of the Circulation Bureau**

"Now, as to the handling of complaints. One primary rule enforced in the handling of this work is that unless for some unsurmountable obstacle, every complaint letter must be finished complete within a maximum of thirty-six hours after it is received—ordinarily, this is reduced to twenty-four hours. As our 'no money mail' is opened, the complaints are sorted under several heads and given to clerks in charge of certain states and sections or engaged in certain parts of the work,

**Promptness of the Answer**

such as, complaints coming from canvassers, from subscribers, from newsdealers, etc. To each letter is attached a blank on which is noted the time of giving it out. On this blank is printed a series of questions, most of which can be answered by a simple affirmative or negative, and which cover almost every element which can enter into a complaint. The clerk handling the letter makes the necessary investigation, going from one point to another, until the cause of the trouble is reached. The questions listed are successively filled out until the cause is located. The letter with the slip attached is then turned over to a correspondent who, from the information thus listed, can answer it intelligently, making any addition or comment of a general character deemed desirable.

**Departmental Charge for Complaints**

"The best may of handling complaints is not to get them. To know how to avoid, it is necessary to know just what caused them. Each complaint clerk every morning starts a sort of tally sheet on which is listed, under about twenty-five heads, every variation of complaint which we receive. Each clerk enters in the proper column on this sheet a tally for each complaint handled and, at the end of the day, these sheets are added up and listed in a report of the complaint work handled that day, these in turn being condensed into monthly tables. From these records, an immense amount of valuable information is obtainable. Each mistake due to causes inside of our own establishment is charged up to the department which made it and, if possible, to the clerk who is responsible. The relative efficiency of those handling the original correspondence as well as of the complaint clerks is thus a matter of record. Weakness in any part of our system at once becomes apparent and the knowledge by our clerks and other employés that every error will, sooner or later, be recorded against him or her and be an element in determining his subsequent value to the company has a strong moral effect in improving the efficiency of the force as a whole.

"A rather surprising point brought out by these

records is the fact that of all complaints handled, about eighty per cent of them are due to causes outside of our establishment. The ingenuity of the public in making errors as shown by the mail of a large publishing house, makes a rather interesting chapter and some variations of these errors are almost beyond belief, except by some one who has been in the habit of handling this sort of mail. Of course, the element of copies lost in the mails or not delivered for various causes plays considerable part.

"Thousands of complaints are practically identical and require the same answer. A great deal of correspondence can be handled by process letters on which the name and address of the addressee are filled in with a typewriter to match the printed portion. Sometimes, a letter can be made up in this way with the exception of a few words to be added at the end of a pragraph, or by the addition of a paragraph. If the letters are well made and the typewritten portions well done, the letter has all the appearance of a complete, typewritten letter and is, of course, less expensive and more expeditious.

**Form or Process Letters**

"The correspondents are provided with a set of instructions covering all the main points entering into the general run of correspondence and, by this means, it is possible to carry on the work with a less expensive corps than would be necessary if each letter required individual judgment and discretion. These instructions are changed quite frequently, depending on the varying conditions or, as found desirable to make effective those plans being pushed at any particular time.

"From previous experience, it is frequently possible to anticipate a certain form of complaint or inquiry for, no matter how explicitly a statement may be made, there is always a certain percentage of those who read it who will misunderstand it or 'take the chance' of there being some laxity on the part of the publisher. Very frequently, a form letter or printed postal can be ordered before a certain matter is before the public with the moral certainty that there will be use for it.

**Anticipating the Complaint**

"By a proper supervision and by a system of records, checkings, etc., it is possible to handle complaints so that all but about one per cent can be handled by clerks receiving moderate wages, relieving those in executive positions of the actual handling of this detail with corresponding advantage to the executive features of the business. While there is no necessity for subsequent reference in the vast majority of complaint letters received, we have found it advisable to keep a carbon copy of every letter which leaves our office, carbon copies being attached to the original letters. When form letters are used, a notation as to the number of the form letter used, is made on the letter in place of a carbon copy."

The foregoing system details practically all the methods in use in the adjustment of business complaints. While the methods used are those specifically adapted to the publishing business, yet the system is so elastic that it is applicable to practically any plant receiving a large volume of complaints.

**Answering the Habitual Complainant**

Some people, even some business men, invariably put in a claim for shortage, damage by transit, or claim inferior quality as a cause for complaint. Being habitual kickers, they have become, by a life time of complaint, skilful in the art of asking concessions, which on the face appear plausible. It requires a most thorough knowledge on the part of the correspondent, first as to the organization of the business of the firm, and second as to the tendency of the complainant, before a letter can be framed so as to meet the case in hand. Besides this knowledge there should always be borne in mind the legal aspect of the document which is to issue. This class of man—particularly if he be in business in a small way, is never happier than when engaged in a

lawsuit with a corporation which he fancies has done him wrong, and it should be remembered that any concessions made in a letter stand out good and strong in court—particularly when a down-trodden workingman is suing a heartless corporation.

When a firm employs any number of travelers going over the territory at specified times, adjustments of any importance may be left to them and the complaint letter, being a mere formal notification that, while expressing regret that the matter has occurred, yet it will be best adjusted by one who is on the ground and knows the circumstances surrounding it, rather than from the office. This adjustment, once made, is final. It is always good business that the work of the traveling man be not added to and interfered with by either collections or adjustments, but in cases where it is necessary to have a personal interview with the complainant, this work falls naturally within the scope of the duties of the traveler.

The complaint letter, however, will always remain the standard and most widely used method of adjustment. Its directness and efficacy will continue to be its chief recommendations, and when written understandingly by one having a thorough comprehension of business, a fair spirit and a complete knowledge of the technique and possibilities of letter writing, it will not fall short of success.

# CHAPTER X

## SALES CORRESPONDENCE

BY GEORGE B. SPENCER

A successful mail order house in Chicago, this home of numerous prosperous mail order establishments, secures most of its original inquiries through a campaign of general publicity carried on through advertisements in specially selected periodicals, and distribution of cleverly designed circulars, and soliciting letters, all of which are intended to arouse the curiosity of the reader concerning he knows not just what, but something which will meet some of his long felt and very pressing needs. His unfortunate condition without the marvelously advantageous appliance advertised is dwelt on at length, a most appealing word picture of what he might realize with it is outlined, and he is urged to investigate without a moment's further delay.

Resultant inquiries are very carefully tabulated. Each name is entered upon a card, the color of which indicates the source of the inquiry—whether periodical, circular or letter literature. On the card is a space in which is entered the name of the publication or number of the circular or letter from which it emanates; also, if either of the two latter, to what list the inquiring communication should be credited. Each of these cards is die cut, so as to give a little thumb tab at the top, upon which is printed a number indicating

**Entering Inquiries When Received**

the business or profession of the inquirer, so that subsequent solicitations and follow-ups may be prepared to appeal especially to people performing particular kinds of work. Across the top of each card, under the thumb tabs, are printed the days of the month, over which may be fitted little metal clips made for the purpose, to show that another letter must be written to the party whose name the card bears, if he does not respond to anything sent him within a week, ten days, two weeks or a month, as the case may require. The cards also provide spaces for mercantile agency ratings, correspondence file number, catalog, letter and circular follow-up, numbers and dates, and a record of business secured.

**Answering and Filing the Inquiries**

An original inquiry opened at the incoming mail division goes first to the inquiry department, where one of the above mentioned cards is at once filled in with the necessary data and attached to it. Both of these then go to the manager of the section handling business to which they relate, who sends them on to the correspondent handling the particular line referred to. If it is special, a reply is dictated and the date of the letter filled in on the card. If it is regular, the correspondent merely marks the card with the proper form number and number of days to elapse before follow-up, and sends it on to a clerk, who fills in the letter designated, sends it out and puts the date of its mailing upon the card.

The original communication of the inquirer then goes to the correspondence file, and the inquirer's card back to the inquiry department, where a clerk fits upon it one of the little metal clips indicating the number of days which must elapse between the date

of first response and first follow-up, as stated after the form number and date upon the card. For instance, suppose an inquiry is received from San Francisco on March 15, and reply goes out the 16th. The card would probably be marked Form No. 1, 3-16-'05-14, indicating follow-up fourteen days afterward. A metal clip would, therefore, be put on over the 30th. On that date the clerk in charge of the list takes out the card and sends it to the correspondent whose business it is to follow it up, and he in turn marks it with the proper form number and sends it on, to go through the same routine as originally.

In this manner over 50 per cent of the inquiries received are turned into actual cash orders. When the first order is received at the inquiry department, the original card is taken from the inquiry list and sent to the customer's department, and a new card of a distinguishing color is filled in with all data on the fire card and attached to the order, which then goes to the entry department of the proper section. Then a clerk, with one operation, makes out the warehouse order, which goes immediately to the forwarding department; the sales record, which goes at once to the manager of the sales, and the auditor's record, from which posting is done, and the invoice (except date), which latter remains in the department until the warehouse order comes back as a notice that the goods have been shipped. The invoice is then dated and mailed to the customer, the warehouse order is filed in the filled order file, and the auditor's record goes to the accounting department for proper entry.

The inquiry list is an essential adjunct of a successful advertising or letter soliciting campaign, because from it may be ascertained just what returns

in inquiries, orders and cash aggregates come in from every piece of literature sent out. In this manner one may be absolutely certain whether an advertisement, a periodical, a circular or a letter is a profitable investment. Without this information, a sales manager is handicapped in checking results, and these he must be able to check with a reasonable degree of accuracy, or he cannot tell in what places he should apply more energy, or where to loosen up the brakes.

**Helping the Advertising Campaign**

In a campaign of this description, the first response to an inquiry is a letter full of straight-from-the-shoulder information—just such as the inquirer is supposed to be asking. It is all meat, plain, logical facts—and accompanied by illustrated and descriptive literature. If it does not bring the desired order, the first follow-up is sent within ten days and contains additional data, suggestions and a strong salesmanlike appeal for immediate action. This failing, a letter of most pertinent illustration, application and suggestion follows in another ten days. If this does not bring down the game, the third follow-up assumes a personal tone designed to bring home to the reader the very intimate interest of the writer and his knowledge of the widespread need of such particular goods as he desires to sell. The magnetic touch of individuality pervades this letter, and an endeavor is made to bring the prospective customer into an atmosphere of convincing friendliness. The fourth, fifth and six follow-ups to the unyielding are much the same in general character, but somewhat different lines are followed for the personal appeal and injection of distinctive individuality into the matter.

**Contents of Answers to Inquiries**

To anyone who holds out beyond the sixth follow-up, a masterpiece of enthusiastic eloquence, finished argumentation and inspired salesmanship is sent. This is always the work of one of the most brilliantly successful and experienced correspondents employed by the concern. The inquiry card then goes into the "unresponsive list," which is therefore cared for by a man who employs the most artistic attractiveness, convincing logic and studied persuasiveness to bring some sort of response. If, after several months, his work produces no results, the card is passed on to the "doubtful list," and, thereafter, is solicited only for new articles added to the sales line, or with an occasional talk which has brought unusually good results in the entire general field.

Any letters returned by the postal authorities are sent at once to the inquiry department, and the corresponding card is at once removed from the list and destroyed. Thus all the lists are kept thoroughly up-to-date and no "deadwood" is allowed to accumulate.

**Keeping Lists Free of "Deadwood"**

A system of this kind, or one similar, is invariably employed by experienced managers of correspondence departments, and is invaluable as an attribute to their work. Original solicitation in any manner is rendered doubly effective through efficient and reliable follow-up methods, and persistent work of this kind is made possible only through adequate mechanical appliances as adjuncts.

# CHAPTER XI

## CORRESPONDENCE AS AN ADJUNCT TO THE SALESMAN

BY G. D. FORD

Rapidly changing business conditions of this rapidly changing age, have seen the duties and functions of the salesman undergo a corresponding development. Departmental organization calls for certain conditions that must exist between the various departments and the units of these departments.

The salesman formerly represented most of the sales organization. It was he who was held entirely responsible for the sales in his territory. The fact that he be assisted, to any material extent, by the home office was scouted. The possibilities of the ordinary commercial letter were then unknown. It was a principal firmly held to, that the only method of selling was that employing the traveling salesman.

Almost the reverse is now the case. The house in its organization does not give the salesman undue prominence. Organization takes care of every question that bears upon efficacy of selling goods. There is no more important part than the correspondence department, which by initiative opens up and partially develops a new field for the salesman, or which coöperates with him to the extent that his work is made easier, more resultful, and more pleasant.

The house in its duties to the salesman has three classes of relationship. These relations are to the following:

(1) The individual customer.
(2) The trade.
(3) The salesman himself.

It is assumed that the house is one selling to the trade through the salesman or through agents, and is one that does a nominal amount of advertising. Such is the outline of the larger class of commercial businesses to-day. Such a business is between the mail order house, selling direct to the consumer, on the one hand, and the house which employs the salesman only, to canvass the consumer.

The first step in the correspondence or sales campaign is the education of the public by means of advertising. This advertising may be either direct or indirect.

Indirect advertising aims at the popularization of the product by means of such an amount of advertising as will first interest the public, second give them confidence in the worth of the firm, and third induce them to buy the product advertised. Direct advertising is such advertising as places an offer or definite proposition before one who will probably buy. Between these two and really a modification of direct advertising, is the method of sowing broadcast, by means of the mails, circular letters, booklets and other literature which it is hoped a fair percentage will take root and later become a much desired order. All this constitutes the education of the customer who will not buy until a certain amount of publicity has been obtained by general advertising and a certain amount of specific solicitation has been made of him, requesting him to buy the product. This education of the public is one of the most important aids to the salesman that can possibly

**Advertising**

exist and the influence of a tactful letter from the house to the prospective customer is such that it can not be over estimated. Not only does it prepare the ground for the planting of the seed, it often plants the seed itself and the grain is waiting for the salesman to harvest when he arrives. The customer brings the pressure to bear upon the retailer to the corresponding profit of the salesman.

Under the second head, relation of the house to the trade, we find an important relationship, and one where more misunderstanding can come than in any other place. Only the man who has "carried a grip" and met his trade year in and year out can realize to what an extent the individual make up the "trade" lean upon the home office. Beginning with the merchant at the crossroad store, who pictures in his mind all the characteristics of the man with whom he is in constant touch, to the city buyer who "likes the hang of that fellow's letter," there is the widest range of impressions made by the correspondence of the house. The country merchant is never under the high pressure that the city merchant is. Business took in is more a matter of friendship oftimes than a strict accounting to rules of barter and trade. He knows the wants of his patrons, their successes, their failures.

**The "Un-Human" Letter**

The short, crisp, snappy letter coming from the city house is to him an indication that the writer is not a friend, he is not human. He is simply a cog in the wheels of the business machine of the city house, having as a task the grinding out of a certain amount of dollars. In all probability the country merchant thinks, too, that the reason why the man with whom he is in weekly communication is not his friend, is because "it is not

his disposition." It is hard for the country merchant to realize that the same sleepy conditions do not prevail in the city office that hold in the country town.

Right here is the correspondent's opportunity. If he has ever "carried a grip" himself, if he can realize the hopes, plans and ambitions of the man to whom he is writing, or if he is naturally a wholesome, hearty, wholesouled, good fellow, his letters will have the rare touch of good fellowship that can not be imitated and which can not be injected into a letter by any slavish adherence to rules of correspondence, or worked out forms.

We see every day that the best correspondent for handling the country trade is the one who is in sympathy with the man to whom he is writing and who thoroughly knows the conditions which the country store man has to meet. Now and then there lives a man who is able to sense this intuitively without having come up through the ranks himself, but such men are rare.

It is not to be supposed that the country store by any means furnishes the greater part of the patronage of an ordinary business, for though their portion is large, country business conditions provide for the subagency as well. This often is a distributing point in a comparatively large district and the firm is made up of the best business men of the district. These men often are drawn from the surrounding country and are in close touch with it in their bringing-up, their training and their trade relations. Besides this there is the city trade, by which is meant the trade in the city of above say 20,000, where the same conditions hold as in the larger places.

Under the third heading, the relation of the house

to its salesmen, we come to the most vital part of the duties of the correspondent. If a customer's letter is wrongly written, if it is the worst possible kind of a botch, it reaches only an individual. The only damage that is done, is that one customer and those under his immediate influence are lost. Even after the customer has been positively mistreated by the correspondent, the combined efforts of the dealer and the salesman may whip him into line, "jolly him up," and get his order and make him a friend of the house. What is said about the fool correspondent is generally not a matter of record and if he does not have another chance to kill the sale, it may be made and the customer may be retained as a friend.

Poor, tactless letters to the trade may be met by the demand of the individual customer to have a certain product; the salesman may be so near to the trade and know it so well, that sales may be saved and no great harm done.

But when the correspondence of the house to the salesman is not what it should be it imposes the greatest handicap upon the entire business that is possible. The salesman has to compete with the most discouraging set of conditions that can possibly assail a man. The irregular hours, poor accommodations, the constant atmosphere of rebuff in which he has to work, makes any mistake on the part of the house a heavy burden in addition to the selling conditions which he has as a part of his business all the while to encounter. If he be a poor man or one in need of constant encouragement, a poor coöperation on the part of the correspondence department, means that his selling efficiency is lowered just that much with a corresponding loss to the house.

It would seem therefore that here is an unexcelled opportunity for the correspondent to grasp a great opportunity. Regarding the entire business organization as a selling force of which he is a part, his is the task, first, to embody in his communications that elusive element, true salesmanship and, second, to keep the salesman at all times supplied with the most exact information regarding the house, its territory and its customers and—what is so rarely done—make every letter a sales letter and so a letter of coöperation.

# CHAPTER XII

## WHOLESALING BY MAIL

BY P. C. DOLARD

The first reply I ever received to one of my form letters read something like this:

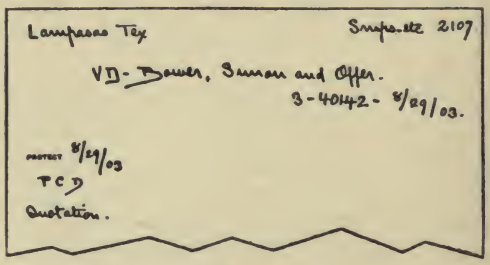
"Gentlemen:—I have just received your circular letter of the 15th inst. We are not in need of anything in your line to-day; perhaps sometime in the future," etc., etc.

When the writer referred to a "circular letter received," I knew it was all over with him, and from that day to this I have sent out only composite letters, printed by the best process obtainable. And I always leave from one to five "insert spaces" scattered through the body of the letter and see to it that all work turned out on the "form machines" matches; if it does not, I remove the cause.

Some houses have a buyer who buys everything needed. When anyone offers a cheaper process, the first thing he considers is the dollar, and orders from the new man, sacrificing quality to save that dollar, regardless of whether the work will be as good as the best. The same principle applies in buying stationery. Some houses put their form letters on the cheapest stock they can buy. They claim that it is only a circular letter and that there is no use to waste money on expensive stock. I am positive that the circular letter I send out is the best that I can get up, because it takes the place of thousands of dictated letters. If

I tried to dictate a letter containing one-half of the argument during the busy season, I would never get through, and I would not be able to get as much business, simply because I did not have time to put the right argument before the prospective customer.

The art of letter writing has been brought to a point of perfection by the mail-order business. A trade compelling courtesy and politeness is injected into our correspondence by pleasantly acknowledging all orders, arranging complaints and attending to the individual wants of each correspondent.



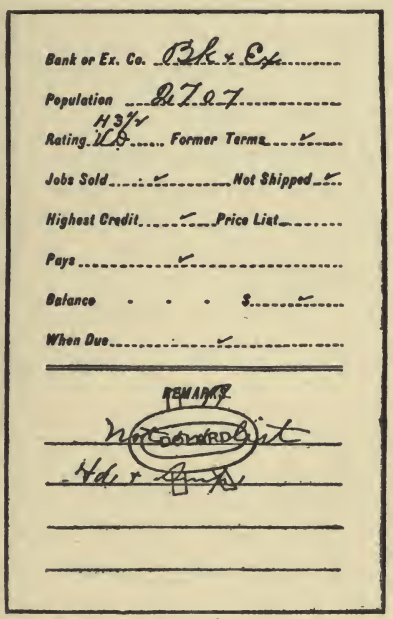

Form I

**Direct Advertising by Correspondence**

A one-line concern will find that direct advertising pays better than anything else where the goods are sold to the dealer, and not to the customer, without the aid of traveling men. The person who gets up the advertising matter should bear two things in mind. First, it costs money to get new customers, and the sooner you get them on your books the better. Make them an especially attractive proposition on something you know is staple in their part of the country to induce them to send in this sample order. Second, arrange your "catalogue request" line so that the dealer will feel

that he has lost a great deal of money by not having one at hand to refer to, and should write at once for it.

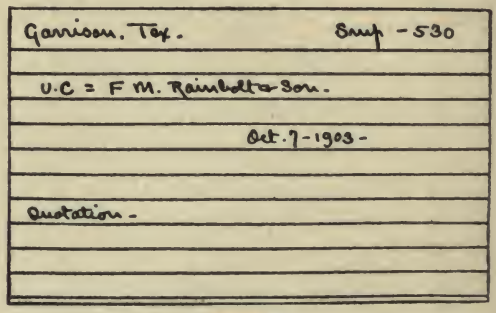
Once place the catalogue and quotations in his hands and you can argue with him. After sixty days of letter writing—if he does not order sooner—we pass his card to the advertising, or publicity case, and once or twice a month send him whatever we have pre-


Bank or Ex. Co. Bk & Ex.
Population 2707
Rating H3½ Former Terms ✓
Jobs Sold ✓ Not Shipped ✓
Highest Credit ✓ Price List
Pays ✓
Balance . . . $ ✓
When Due ✓
REMARKS
Mr. Dolard Pres
Hdlr

Form II

pared for circularizing at that time, and continue to send him advertising matter during the year he makes inquiry and all of the year following, provided we do not get some other representative in the meantime. Our object in circularizing so much is to bring in the sam-

ple order by offering something staple at a very low price. By this means we are able to demonstrate the worth of our line as compared with others. Publicity counts. Bombard your customers and advertising list with catchy, well-written circular matter, and it will not be long until when they want something in your line they will think of you. If your prices are right you will get first chance, and with that the battle is half won.

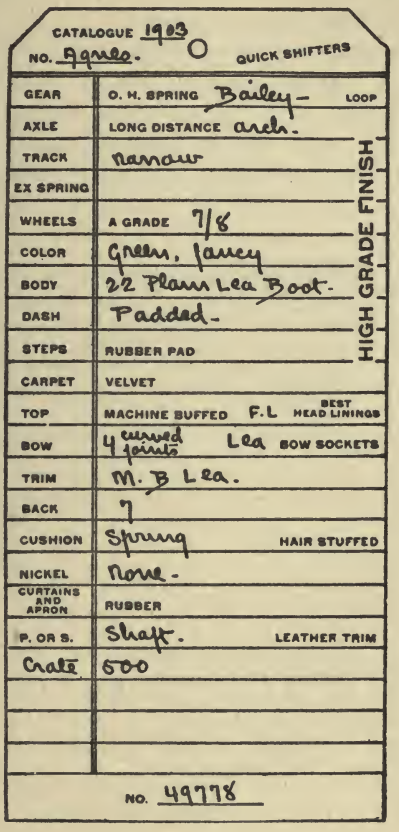



Form III

**Incoming Mail —How Handled and Distributed**

All mail is received and opened at the mail desk. The return envelopes, which are inserted in all catalogs and correspondence, are sorted from the others and opened first, because they generally contain orders, and getting at the orders first expedites matters. All other mail follows, as soon as ready, to the correspondents, who handle the mail alphabetically by name. For instance, one takes A-D, another E-J, and so on. On account of the varied requirements we send all mail to the correspondents first, and they make memoranda across the face of the letter for what they want from the files and records.

Requests for catalogs go to the "look-up" department, where slip (Form II) is attached and filled out, giving all the information we have about the party.



CATALOGUE 1903
NO. Agnes. O QUICK SHIFTERS

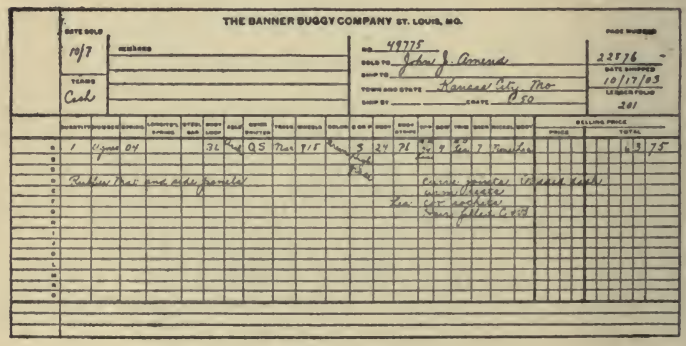
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| GEAR | O. H. SPRING Bailey — LOOP | |
| AXLE | LONG DISTANCE arch. | |
| TRACK | narrow | HIGH GRADE FINISH |
| EX SPRING | | |
| WHEELS | A GRADE 7/8 | |
| COLOR | Green, Janey | |
| BODY | 22 Plain Lea Boot. | |
| DASH | Padded. | |
| STEPS | RUBBER PAD | |
| CARPET | VELVET | |
| TOP | MACHINE BUFFED F.L BEST HEAD LININGS | |
| BOW | 4 curved joints Lea BOW SOCKETS | |
| TRIM | M. B Lea. | |
| BACK | 7 | |
| CUSHION | Spring HAIR STUFFED | |
| NICKEL | None. | |
| CURTAINS AND APRON | RUBBER | |
| P. OR S. | Shaft. LEATHER TRIM | |
| Crate | 500 | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

NO. 49778

Form IV

The bottom of the slip is marked "Not on list," and then the town is given a map "look-up." If it does not

conflict with a customer and is not from an apparent consumer we quote prices and send catalog, and the original request is put in the "follow-up" file, and the party gets a letter every fifteen days for sixty days, unless he answers or orders, in which case the letter is taken from the "follow-up" file and attached to this second letter. After that it is filed "miscellaneous," if not an order, and "folder," if an order. If the answer is an order a red card (Form I) is made out, and the white card (Form III) taken up and destroyed.




Form V

An order comes direct from the correspondent to the order department to be "written up." A factory ticket (Form IV) and duplicate order sheets (Form V) are made out. The duplicate sheet and the ticket then go to the factory, stopping only at the traffic manager's desk for routing and rate. Arriving at the factory, the order is entered on their "output" record, the ticket sent to the "buggy builders" to fill the order, and the sheet is sent to the shipping clerk, who ar-

ranges for shipment. When the buggy is ready to go out, the sheet, factory ticket and receipted dray ticket are returned to this office, and they are attached to the original order and filed under the order number.

Now for the office work. The original order sheet goes from the order department to the "look-up" department, where it is entered on the customer card (Form I) and on the record card (Form VI), which is located in the case by guide cards (Form VII),

NAME: J J Amend — PLACE: Kansas City, Mo.

| NO. OF JOBS | ORDER NUMBER | S. S. M. EX M. C. EX. | SALES PAGE | TICKET FILING | DATE ENT. | PUT OUT | TO SHIP | SHIPPED | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 49778 | B | 22876 | 2365 | 10/7 | 10/8 | 10/17 | 10/17 | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

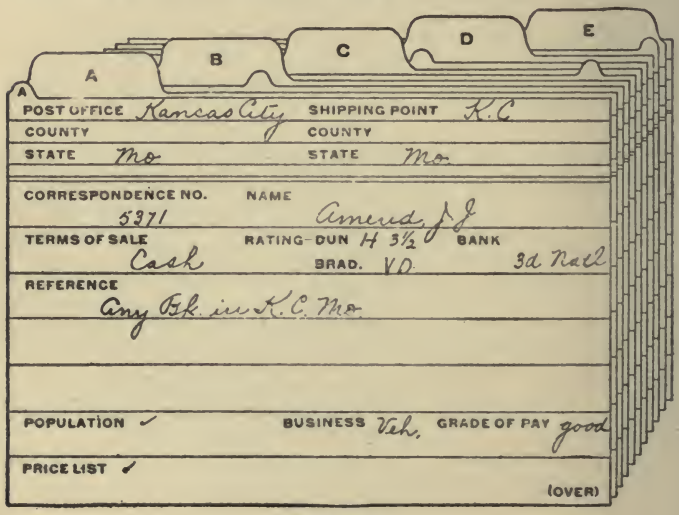
Form VI

which is filed geographically. Then the sheet goes to the billing department (the invoice is held until the factory tickets come through as above, and is sent out on the day of shipment), and then goes from here to the bookkeeping department for charge. Then it goes into a loose-leaf binder, to be kept for future reference.

If the order is from a jobber, to be shipped direct, we make out an additional card for this customer (Form VIII), which gives us a cross reference in case

the jobber's customer writes to us in regard to the buggy shipped at any future time.

All orders are acknowledged by letter and the carbon filed in the "acknowledgment folder" under the initial of the party ordering. If we want to know if an order is in the house for anyone we look in the folder, and, as we acknowledge all orders at once, we



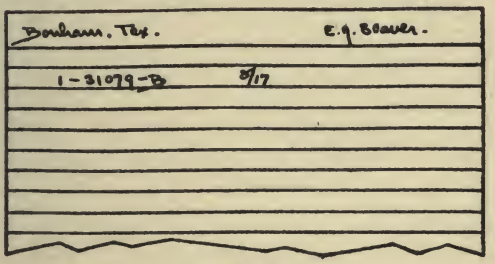

Form VII

are sure to find out there if the order has been accepted. If it is not accepted the carbon of our answer is then in the regular files.

**Turning Inquiries Into Orders**

Turning inquiries into orders is very important work. I use a "follow-up" file for every promise, tip and other information. It is arranged to allow for regular follow-up, any number of days apart, according to the locality and season. I first take thirty vertical file guides and

number them with black ink from 1 to 30 consecutively, for each day of the month (if the month has thirty-one days, put your follow-ups for the 31st under "1"), and put on the letters "A" through "J" in red ink on guides from 1, including 10, and repeat from 11 through 20, and 21 through 30 (Form IX). Then take 120 vertical filing folders and mark in black thirty of them, "2 F. S.," thirty "3 F. S.," thirty "4 F. S.," and thirty "Special." Then make up sets of four folders, one each as above, in order named, and place them following the guides. This finished, the "follow-up" file is ready for business.

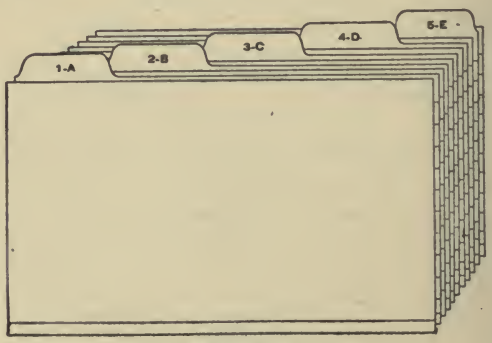



Form VIII

With this arrangement you may have an unfailing reminder every day for all matters filed ahead any number of days.

It will be noticed that the date is stamped on white card (Form III). We pay no attention, as far as this file is concerned, to the month or year. This leaves "7," and under guide 7 in "2 F. S." folder the original letter is filed and remains, say, fifteen days. Then it comes out and gets "looked-up"—that is, the white card is located. If the party has not ordered (which would be marked on the card, thus: "Ord. 10/14"),

he gets letter "2 F. S.," and the original is again filed under the same guide, but in the "3 F. S." folder, and so on, until the party is heard from. If the party should answer in such a way as to necessitate the tenor of our letters to be changed, we put the original letter and the last carbon in the "Special" folder under the date we want to write again and mark the date—for instance, "20"—on the white card (Form III), which shows us that it is filed under guide 20 in the "Special" folder.




Form IX

I always start with the guide marked with the same number as the date on which the work is to be done and take out all letters from the folders for follow-up, including the "Special," according to the time decided upon. The "Special" folder for the date in question is the only "Special" disturbed; the rest are taken out in groups. For instance, if the follow-up is five days, take out all letters under guides in the same position as the date on which you are working; if ten days, take out that day's folders and the folders, not including "Special," from every other guide bear-

ing the same alphabet letter; if fifteen days, every third guide in the same position; if twenty days, the "4 F. S." and "Special" under the guide for the day the work is being done, and the "2 and 3 F. S." folders under the other guides bearing the same alphabet letter; if twenty-five days, add five to the date you are working and take out from that folder also. For instance, if you are working on the seventh, take out letters under guides 7 and 12.

On all of the above changes in time between writing, except the last one, the folders will alternate in showing up automatically, and require no mathematician to "figure it out." To show this point, take the twenty-day follow-up to be worked on the fourth of the month. You will start with guide 4—take out "Special" and "4 F. S." folders; under guide 14, "2 F. S." folder; under guide 24, "3 F. S." folder.

Of course, the above arrangement may appear a little elaborate to some people, but when you stop to think of the large number of letters we deem worth following up, you will see that it takes some system a little more complete than ordinary. I will also mention that the entire office contributes to the filling up of the "Special" folders, with all sorts of matters requiring future attention. The person who wants a note filed simply attaches a slip made out something like this, "File ahead to 10/17," and passes it over to our department for filing. We return it with all papers received in the meantime the day it shows up in the file.

Some otherwise good firms slight the very points in correspondence that make the mail order department of a business a success. To cite one case for illustration: A large concern received an inquiry in

reference to the price of a certain article. When the answer was received it was not complete; there were two or three important questions left unanswered. The inquirer wrote another letter explaining the necessity of an answer covering the points mentioned. Then came a wait of ten days, when a follow-up letter arrived, but no answer to the questions. Then the inquirer wrote again. Then a wait of three days, when a letter was received which was well written and contained every bit of information asked for in the first place. The inquirer was satisfied to give them the order and did. The order was given provided certain conditions were complied with in reference to time of delivery, and this company has not so far deemed it worth the while to even acknowledge the order. To an experienced person this tells the story of incompetent office management. I will try to point out the defects of this particular case. The letter from the inquirer arrives; the correspondent reads it for digest and should have checked, thus, (√), each point needing answer, and cross-checked, as he came to and answered them. This would have insured the answering of all the questions—a vital point. Then, when the inquirer wrote the second time it should have prevented the sending of a follow-up—which sounds foolish to a business man who is seeking information from you and cannot get it. This shows that the way of filing and indexing is not what is needed. Then came the wait of ten days. For this there is no excuse. Then the inquirer asks why he does not receive an answer to his former letter and receives a reply such as he should have received in the first place. This shows the system to be lax, correspondence is not massed properly and not answered the same days as received. This is

very important. Then the next and last point was the sending of the conditional order, which was not acknowledged in any way. Imagine a concern not thoughtful enough of a customer's feelings or the future of its business to take the trouble to let him know whether the order is acceptable under the conditions named.

Cases like the above furnish reasons why some men fail in this particular line of work—business developing.

**Using Catalogues as Salesmen**

For years the manufacturer and large jobber have been trying to solve the problem of selling their goods to the trade without the aid of traveling men. Every year we find more of them doing it on a plan more or less perfect, until to-day we find that ninety-nine per cent of the progressive buyers of the country would rather buy from the catalogue, because they can buy cheaper.

A catalogue can take its line to each of a hundred thousand buyers in about the time that a drummer could pack his grip and travel from Kansas City to St. Louis.

The government will cover the country with catalogues in a week, while it would take an army of traveling men to call on the trade in each town as often as we do with our catalogue and other pieces of direct advertising and letter writing.

When a manufacturer decides to "wholesale by mail," he should remember that he is just as independent as when he employed traveling men, provided he has "good goods at the right price."

It has been demonstrated time and again that a one or two line concern can sell more goods for less money and still make more money without traveling

men than with them, for two reasons: First, because the selling expense is much less, and, second, because the selling price is less.

This gives the "mail-order" man the upper hand over his competitor who uses traveling men and who must add their large expense account to the selling price.

Some concerns contend that traveling men are a great assistance to the "credit man." This is true to a certain extent, but there are very few credit men nowadays who cannot get along without their assistance, simply because they know, among other things, that the very large majority of merchants who are close buyers are also good payers, because they are successful with their business.

**Credits vs. the Traveling Man**

Catalogues should reach their destination as soon after the inquiry is received as possible, because the dealer is interested in the line, and it must be there first, if possible, and after he once receives our catalogue it is new and up-to-date until a new one comes in. Its prices are guaranteed and it is always ready to do business. A catalogue calls on its thousands of dealers in the time that a drummer could call on thirty—and at one-fifth the cost.

It is the advantage of selling our vehicles by mail over selling them by traveling men that the ratio of expense diminishes. When another factory sells an extra amount of goods, they must put on more road men, so their ratio of expense is still the same. The more one sells, the less it costs to sell.

Of course, the success of "wholesaling by mail" hinges on system, and without it you are lost.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE COLLECTION LETTER

BY C. A. RANSOM

Perhaps the most difficult of all letters to write is the collection letter, for the reason that it must perform the hardest feat of any kind of correspondence—that of inducing a person to do that which he does not wish to do, and will put off doing until the last possible minute.

The sales letter has but to convince the prospect that he needs what the correspondent has to sell, the complaint letter has only to satisfy a complainant in regard to something that has passed, but the collection letter must change him from unwillingness to willingness and cause him to *act*, and that too along the line of greatest resistance.

The function of the collection letter is one of great importance because of its immense potential value when properly used. The open account particularly is of little actual use. True, it represents something, but it is too intangible to be available in a time of strenuous need. Unlike a bundle of notes, a list of back collections can not be taken to the bank as collateral security. There is always the hope that the list will clean up and that the hard cash represented by it will materialize. This it will only do through the agency of the collector or collection letter. The cost bars out the former; the latter is the means that falls naturally to hand. and

from its universality of application and efficacy comes its importance.

Collection letters fall naturally into three classes:

(1) The casual dun.

(2) The house collection letter.

(3) The true collection letter.

Letters belonging to the first class are not strictly collection letters, only inasmuch as they have as their object the making of a collection. Such letters as these are easily called to mind, and have, or can have, no general form, usually beginning with statements entirely foreign to the subject and leading up gradually to the point which is the cause of being of the particular letter in question: that the recipient is indebted to the writer in and for a small sum which is casually—perhaps apologetically—mentioned. This style of letter is used most commonly between friends, more than in the business world. However, the use of the casual collection letter is important and has its proper place as a business communication.

**The Personal Appeal**

As an example of this class of communication may be mentioned a letter that, at certain times, would invariably issue from one of the largest grocery houses of the west. When the credit man found that certain of the old time customers of the house were behind in their customary settlements, he would have written a tactful letter, apparently coming from the head of the house, who was known throughout his territory as an essentially fair man—often in the case of a firm known to be ticklish as regard to "duns,"—written with a pen and ink instead of in typewriting. This letter would merely be a personal appeal asking if anything was wrong, and insinuating in broad and general terms

that if such was the case that the house would be only too glad to be an assistant to an old standby like the man or firm addressed. The effect of one of these personal appeals was not only the required remittance, but it acted as a means of forestalling any misunderstanding that might possibly have arisen had hackneyed methods been used.

In a minor sense of the word, though not in the strictest interpretation, the ordinary house letter requesting payment is not a collection letter. In even many of the largest and oldest established houses, these smack too strongly of the "form" to be of themselves a real letter. It is only after the account has run by the customary thirty, sixty, or ninety days that the personal element begins to manifest itself and the communication becomes a true collection letter.

**Understanding the Delinquent**

The requirements of a good house collection letter are comparatively simple; indeed they are so simple that they are often overlooked or passed over. The first and main essential is that the writer understand the surroundings of the collection itself, and more particularly the event or series of events which has led up to the nonpayment of the overdue account. Many a man is a capable and fluent correspondent and yet can not realize even in the smallest degree the standpoint of the man to whom he is writing. This comes perhaps from the fact that he has not been "through the mill" or rather through the same mill as has the man who is down on the list of delinquents. The man at the crossroad store looks upon the rest of the world with different eyes than does the merchant in the town of five hundred people. The merchant, who perhaps runs a department store in a town of five thousand inhabitants, has a different view-

point than does the man in the city of five or ten times that size. Least of all does the point of view of the city man—particularly if he is city born and bred—coincide with the point of view of the country merchant. The least touch of superciliousness, or what may be more plainly called "big headedness," stultifies the effect of a letter—more particularly a collection letter—quicker than anything else possibly can.

**The Essential Element Fairness**

The man who has actually had the experience that the man to whom he is writing has had, has the knowledge at his command that can make his letter "ring true;" he can see in his mind's eye what excuses he himself would be making under the same circumstances were he in the other man's shoes. So is he able to answer those excuses from a fair though logical standpoint, and to make a collection and still retain the man's friendship and his trade, requiring as it does fairness above all other things.

The second requirement of a good house collection letter is that it makes a definite and reasonable request in a manner firm enough to bring the required result. The request must be definite or it will probably receive little attention; it must be reasonable or it surely will not. The firmness must be enough in evidence to show unmistakably that it is there; it must not be too much in evidence or it will be offensive, and offensiveness destroys the pleasant relations that should exist and changes compliance into resistance.

The remaining main requirements of the house collection letter are those of any written communication, to observe the general rules of good sense and the specific rules of letter writing.

The point to determine as regards the use of the

house collection letter, is whether this letter should be unmistakably and distinctly a personal one. Form letters have this advantage, that they have been worked out, been tried, and hence in no sense of the word are an unknown quantity. The disadvantage is that the collector is liable to lean too hard on the form letter, when a distinct personal letter would accomplish the work much better. Then, too, the recipient, if one who is liable to be habitually behind in his account, is liable to receive "Form One" so many times that by the third or fourth time it is received it is liable to be so familiar in its phrasing to him that the result is lost.

**The Form Collection Letter**

It may be said that there are two classes of customers—and consequent delinquents—those who have a broad understanding of the principles of business and those who are limited, or who limit themselves, to the narrowest plane, that of their own immediate surroundings and to those cases which touch themselves and their business alone.

The form of letter that is generally used and has the virtue of having done the work time and time again, is as follows:

Dear Sir:—

We attach herewith a statement of your account, and although the total is not large, a remittance would be of more than the usual value to us. We, therefore, ask that you forward this amount on or before the 15th of the month, as at that time we have a number of unsually heavy obligations to meet.

While there is no slump in business and collections are about as usual—a little slower than common, if anything, yet we have been subjected

to an unusually heavy expense lately, and your remittance will do its part in helping us out.

In going over the comparative statements of the business received from you during the past few months, and the corresponding months of last year, we notice that we have not received, perhaps, a fair share of your business. This can not be because of a falling off of your trade, as we are assured that you are having a successful year.

We shall, therefore, look for your remittance by the 15th, at the very outside, and will greatly appreciate it if a substantial order accompanies the same.

Very sincerely,

It will be noted that the foregoing asks a certain remittance at a certain time; shows an intimate knowledge of the customer's business, asking for a fair share of it, and tries to steer a middle course by being forcible enough to enforce a collection, and friendly enough to retain the customer's friendship.

There are many credit men who do not wish to quote the shortness of funds on hand by the house, as a reason for remittance. In place of this specific request a general reason is often used by this class of credit men; the advantage that will accrue to the one written by doing the fair thing and so adding his mite to the vast total of business fairness that keeps the wheels of commerce oiled and going.

In direct opposition to the foregoing class of form letter is a direct appeal made to a customer known to the house, and who must be approached in a certain way in order to make him remit.

As an example of this class of letter may be quoted the following:

Dear Sir:—

There must be some reason why you have been letting your usual prompt remittances to the house drag along as they have been doing for the past three or four months.

We know the condition of trade in your part of the country is a little slow at present, but at the same time we feel justified in asking you to keep your credit up to the usual high standard you have observed in the past.

We are going to be very frank with you and state unconditionally that we need the money, even the small sum that is now coming from you.

We know that your credit is perfectly good at the First National Bank of your city to any reasonable amount, and that it puts you to no inconvenience to secure a loan of this size. If collections are such that they do not warrant your sending this amount, you will find the First National Bank, we are sure, is ready and willing to take your paper.

Remembering our pleasant relations in the past and the many favors we have extended each other, we will look with confidence for your remittance on the 15th of the month.

Yours most sincerely,

This letter must at all times be based upon precise information and exact knowledge of circumstances.

**Overcoming Lack of Initiative**

Many a man in business in a small town needs to be told specifically what he should do in the matter of collections. He may be easy-going or possess one of a dozen other qualifications which unfit him for definitely going ahead and doing a particular thing, and in all probability he lacks—in common with the majority of mankind the priceless faculty of initiative. When, however, a cer-

tain plan is laid out for him and made easy it will bring results, where a general request would bring partial or complete ignorement.

After the two preceding classes, the casual dun and the house collection letter, comes the true collection letter, by which is meant—in the restricted sense of the term—a communication to a debtor from a creditor, or an authorized representative of a creditor, the object of which is the making of a collection regardless of auxiliarly circumstances. This class of letter is shown in its most complete light in the communications put out by collection agencies using the "letter system."

**The True Collection Letter**

Unlike the house collection letter, under the "letter system" there is little or no room for fairness. It is the requirement of the collection agency to collect. One of the reasons leading a man to remit is that it is advisable for him to do so. He owes a certain account. That is the premise. He should be made to pay it. That is the conclusion. This leaves no room for excuses, extensions, or history of the case; it calls only for remittances, and the larger the remittances, the better the collection letter that has caused them.

The history of the collection agency letter has been one of evolution. Half a dozen years ago, it was considered necessary to use at least six form letters in addressing a list of debtors. These form letters generally made no pretense to being a dictated or personal communication. They were printed in imitation typewriting and sometimes filled in by hand. Collection agency methods of precedure give an explanation for this.

The first step of a collection agency is to list the claims forwarded them, sending form "Number I" to the various addresses on the list. This form generally reads as follows:

Dear Sir:—

Our client, ....., of ....., State of ....., has this day placed with this Agency for immediate collection, a claim against you, amounting to $....., which is now long past due. Presuming that your failure to settle this account has been more through neglect than any intention of yours to avoid the payment of the same, we respectfully request that you will call on or write to our client, Mr. ....., and make settlement without any further delay. We will not take any action in the above matter for ten (10) days in order that you may have a chance to make settlement. If necessary to write to us answer on the back of this letter.

Yours respectfully,

**Why the Form Letter is Effective**

This form letter is as effective as any kind of letter would be for the reason that any responsible person receiving a letter from a collection agency will answer it at once, stating the facts regarding the claim as viewed by him and negotiations may be entered upon between the agency and the debtor at once. During this time the claim is marked "wait" on the list, showing that special work is being done upon it so as to prevent other form letters being sent. The remainder of the list not answering the first communication is made up of those to whom a form letter means as much as a personal communication. When a list is made up of farmers or workingmen it will be found that a circular or form letter is given substantially the same attention as a personal one.

The remaining letters are progressive in intensity. As seen by the first letter, that form merely notifies the debtor that the claim has been listed with the col-

lection agency and tactfully requests the settlement with the client, not the agency.

The form of letter which formerly was the third, but is now generally sent out as the second letter of the series, reads as follows:

Dear Sir:—

We are surprised to be obliged to again call your attention to the claim placed in our hands by Mr. ....., of ....., State of ....., amounting to $..... We wish to impress upon your mind that simply because we have been so lenient with you up to this time, that we are not going to let the matter rest, by simply writing to you. The amount is justly due your creditor and the same must be paid immediately unless you wish us to place your name on our delinquent list, which will make it impossible for you to obtain any further credit. Our delinquent list is in the hands of every reliable merchant and professional man in the state. That there may be no mistake in your case we should urge you to call on or write to your creditor immediately. Unless same is reported to this Agency as being paid or satisfactorily settled, we shall be obliged to proceed in the premises.

Answer on the back of this letter.

Yours respectfully,

It will be noticed that the main point of this letter is the one making a reference to a certain "delinquent list" on which it is presumed the party addressed would not care to have his name.

What was formerly the sixth letter in the series, but is now commonly sent out as the third, reads as follows:

Dear Sir:—

We have recently consulted with our client, ....., of ....., in reference to the claim that we have repeatedly notified you of, and that we hold for collection against you, and have received word to proceed and prosecute the claim at once, and as per instruction we shall proceed to have the claim verified before a Notary Public, after which we will begin proceedings to enforce the collection forthwith.

You may think you are beyond the reach of the law, and that you need pay no attention to the matter, but we can require you to appear in Court in obedience to a summons, and if you fail to appear we can bring you up on supplementary proceedings. This will necessarily add sheriff and court costs to the above claim, besides the publicity of a lawsuit.

We have no desire to mislead you, but we believe that if you fully understand how much this small claim will cost you, that you will forward same to your creditor, so that we can stop further proceedings. Kindly do not attach any blame to us if we necessarily put you to considerable trouble and costs in the above matter, as we have been very lenient with you in the past, but we have now come to the conclusion that in duty bound to our client, we shall forthwith avail ourselves of the laws of the state to their fullest extent, which are in such case made and provided.

Yours truly,

This is the first letter of the series that uses on the margin a number of statements giving the law on attachments, executions, garnishments, judgments, supplementary proceedings, and other matters. These statements are printed in fine type on the left hand

margin occupying a space two by eight inches. The following extracts will give an idea of their character:

"No responsible man will allow, and a poor man can not afford, to have judgment and costs rendered against him. The proper time to make a defense or settle an account is before the case gets into court. When once judgment is entered, defenses are barred.

"It is common law, existing in every state, that any person or persons receiving any article or articles and making use of the same, is liable for payment.

"*Attachments*—Attachments allowed in action for recovery of money, at time of issuing the summons, or any time afterward, against property of the defendant.

"*Garnishments*—Garnishments in any action in a Court of Record or Justice Court, the property, money or effects of defendant in the hands of or under the control of any person may be reached by garnishment.

"*Supplementary Proceedings*—Upon the return of an execution, unsatisfied in whole or in part, the judgment creditor may procure an order from the district court requiring the judgment debtor to appear before the judge, or a referee, and answer on oath touching his property. The debtor may also be restrained, by order, from interfering with or disposing of his property not exempt from execution during the proceedings. If there is danger of the debtor leaving the state, he may be arrested upon a warrant issued by the judge on proof of the facts. Witnesses may be required to appear and testify in the proceedings. A receiver may be appointed with power to take the property of the debtor and convert it into money and apply the proceeds upon the judgment. Disobedience to orders made in these proceedings is punishable as contempt. The debtor can not be excused from answering questions in the examination on the ground that the examination would convict him of the commission of a fraud."

In addition to the regular letter head the following statement appears below it:

"Confidential list of Unpaid Bills, giving the names and addresses of the debtors in full, to protect merchants from giving credit to irresponsible parties, who are making no effort to pay their honest obligations, furnished to merchants and professional men, free on our Special Report Blanks.

"Goods obtained under false pretenses and credit obtained by false representations or any act of fraud punishable by law will be thoroughly investigated. We have traveling collectors everywhere to visit such cases personally."

Whether or not these forms add to the effectiveness of the collection letter is a debatable question. Some collection agencies hold otherwise and do not use them but the majority of collectors still adhere to the use of them in their forms. After a delinquent has replied to a form, however, it is customary to use ordinary commercial letter paper in correspondence with him.

**Original Notice Before Suit**

While not in the strictest sense a collection letter, the "Original Notice Before Suit" is such an important weapon in the hand of the collector that it should be considered as cumulating and bringing to a head the influence that the various collection letters already written have had. This form is shown in Figure I, and is sent when no response is had to letters or when promises made by the debtor are not lived up to. This form is of use only when judgment has not been had on the claim, and under such circumstances has been found to be practically efficient in effecting small claims. Owing to the legal aspect of the document it is given attention when letters are ignored, for the ordinary person has a well-grounded dislike of law-suits.

After a debtor has responded to a form letter, the real work of the correspondent begins. It is often said

**Real Correspondence—Where it Begins**

that the basis of salesmanship is diplomacy; that diplomacy sells more goods than any other one attribute. But the diplomacy of the salesman is as naught by the side of the diplomacy that must be displayed by the correspondent who takes up a claim at the point where the form letter leaves off. The salesman seldom or never

ORIGINAL NOTICE BEFORE SUIT.

State of Minnesota, } ss
COUNTY OF FREEBORN

WM. E. CARRUTHERS,
Attorney for Plaintiff

P. C. Jensen, Plaintiff
vs
Jacob Jorgenson, Geneva, Minn. Defendant

You will please take notice that the above named plaintiff claim that you are indebted to them in the sum of $ 5.22, and that although duly demanded, the same has not been paid or any part thereof

Now Therefore, Unless you remit or appear at our office, Citizens Bank Bldg., Albert Lea, in County and State aforesaid, on or before the 19th day of May A. D. 190 1, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon of the said day, and make payment to us of said claim, with interest thereon, or provide for the adjustment thereof, suit will be brought forthwith for the total amount with interest, together with the costs and disbursements of the action.

Dated at Albert Lea, Minnesota, this 27th day of April 190 1

Wm. E. Carruthers
Attorney for Plaintiff
Office over of Citizens Bank, Albert Lea, Minn.

**Figure I; The Original Notice Before Suit; sent folded so as to resemble a summons**

has to deal with an angry customer; he has only to convince him that he will do him good by selling him. But the correspondent, under the conditions referred to, has to deal with a man who firmly believes he has been injured and yet in the face of all of this, this man must be brought to do one of the most difficult things that is found in business; viz., give up his

money. "Paying for a dead horse," it has been graphically called. When the two elements are considered, that the debtor is either convinced that he has been wronged—probably from the start—and that he must pay for something that he has had and is in all probability now used up or worn out, then the magnitude of the task that lies before collection can only be realized.

**The Standpoint of the Collection Letter**

The stand that the letter takes under all circumstances is this: "We neither know nor care as to the merits of the case. Your position may be right or it may be wrong. In the eyes of the law this is a just debt and we simply are the means of enforcing the law." The debtor is at all times urged to make remittance, not because it is right that he do so, but because it is advisable; that the law is such that he, being a delinquent is subject to certain penalties, and that it lies in his power to avert the enforcement of these penalties by—remittance.

In other words the collector regards the debt as a surgeon would a superfluous growth that it is necessary to remove. It is needless to say that a correspondent who is super-sensitive or impressionable makes a poor collector, just as would a physician who is morbidly depressed by the sight of disease be unfitted for his calling.

There are numerous times, however, when this stand will not be as effective as what may be called the sympathetic method of treatment. A large number of people in the world—in fact the greater number of people, have an income that is constantly being swallowed up by a thousand petty expenses.

Their disbursements being larger than their incomes the result is that a large number of debts grad-

ually accumulate. Now it is a fact that these debts will be paid as a general thing, to those who bring the most pressure to bear. But exclusive of this class there are those from whom collections may be made by wheedling them out of their cash—not by forcing it out of them.

The class of letter which does this may be termed the sympathetic letter. The sympathetic letter fairly radiates sympathy. Not only does it assure the debtor that his lot is hard, but perhaps mysteriously hints that the writer has had a much similar grief in the past and has come through the experience broader and better because of it. This letter, it is needless to say, requires a master of the letter-writing art. It must not be "slushy" and it must keep in mind that remittances must follow.

**The Sympathetic Letter**

It has been well said that people living in an air of sentiment are caused a great deal of suffering by the brutal letter, and feel that they are paying their debt in that manner, and prefer to make payments in that way. In other words the brutal collection letter gives the recipient ample chance for self-justification and the consequent ignoring of all communications.

The success of the stereotyped collection letter in enforcing small claims has been taken advantage of by many business houses having a class of trade that is liable to lead to a number of small, relatively unimportant debits which accumulate and which an ordinary letter of collection will not reach. The means by which the collection letter is used under these circumstances is usually this:

**House Collection Letters**

The house maintains a collection agency of its own consisting in the main of a number of form letters

signed by either the house attorney or a collection agency run in his name. This gives the appearance of letters emanating from a true collection agency and a certain per cent will remit at once in response to a collection agency letter who would pay no attention whatever to any other kind of demand.

In case the customer writes to the house or makes a remittance, it is often possible to retain his good will by the statement that the agency went beyond what they were authorized to do, and in this way the only harmful result of a severe letter is mitigated or annulled.

**Unexpected Effects of Collection Letters**

Perhaps the one thing that is most commonly noticed in connection with the collection agency letter coming from a true agency is the fact that the method of going after a collection hammer and tongs often makes the collection and at the same time retains the good-will of the debtor himself. As a side light on human nature it is an interesting fact that it is no uncommon thing for a debtor who has been assailed by a series of collection communications, to remit, and in sending his remittance enclose a list of claims himself, with the instruction, "Put the enclosed list of names through the same experience that I have had." The interesting excuses, too, that are brought to life, too, by collection agency letters, are something quite wonderful and if formulated in a volume would make most interesting reading.

Finally, it may be said of the collection letter that its principal function is that of "*making the claim*" regardless of any of the conditions which may surround it, and the best letter as judged from the collection standpoint, is the one that effects the largest percentage of claims.

# CHAPTER XIV

## INTERHOUSE AND INTERDEPARTMENT CORRESPONDENCE

### PART I. ADVANTAGE OF WRITTEN ORDERS

BY C. A. BURT

The large business establishment of to-day is a living manifestation of the efficacy of the written order. What man would feel safe if he were on a fast train and knew that it was traveling on verbal orders? Would he not immediately be concerned for fear that the engineer had misunderstood or, having rightly understood might forget?

It is just this feeling that has prompted the rapid introduction and retention of the written order wherever possible. There is no justification for the use of the verbal order. It may be not only misunderstood at the time of giving but it is the most fruitful cause of misunderstanding after it has been given. This is summed up in the business adage, "Make all matters of business importance matters of record."

This making of business obligations a matter of record is one that can not be overemphasized. The written order, putting its instructions, request, or order down in black and white, puts the employé, department manager, or general manager "on record," and a history of any and all moves on the part of everyone concerned in the business may be had by consulting the files. Promises made may be verified; predictions may

be compared with what actually happened; orders may be checked up with their fulfillment.

Interdepartment communications are those which pass between the heads of the various departments, as between the accounting and circulation department; between the general manager and the various department heads. There is however, a class of interdepartment communications which may better be termed general or multiple orders. The general or multiple order is one issued by the general manager to the heads of the various departments under him, who are to receive the same general instructions. A general letter of this class will be one requesting the observance of certain general conditions, as one asking them to secure better efficiency from the various employés under them, one calling attention to the lack of system, the excess of red tape, general slackness of the house conditions due to some cause within their control, etc.

Definition

Often a general order letter is issued by the general manager calling attention to a condition which is the fault of perhaps only one or two departments alone. This letter or order is made out in duplicate and addressed to each man for whom it is intended. He acknowledges the receipt of the communication by O. K.ing the original.

This order heads off any thought on the part of the men receiving it that there is any partiality shown or that others are not held responsible for certain conditions as well as themselves. The efficacy of this kind of interdepartment communication is very marked if given a timely use.

The interhouse letter is one passing between different houses under the same or substantially the same

control, or between branches of houses which maintain separate organizations and yet are one in management.

Still a third form of correspondence is seen in a treatment of the independent agent by the house.

**The Independent Agent**

The independent agent has the anomaly of being at the same time an authorized representative of the house and a customer as well. He must in fact be used better and more diplomacy shown in his treatment than with the ordinary customer. Such an agent has built up, by strength of his own personality a patronage of his own. This trade he swings. If he handles one line one year and another line another in all probability ninety per cent of his trade goes with him to the new house. The difficulty in handling him is at the first sign of a falling off in his trade, the reason must be determined and he must be conciliated and again placed on the best business basis with the company which he represents.

The letter which stirs the agent to renewed activity is one that partakes of the nature of an interhouse letter, inasmuch as the agent is really a part of the house. It represents and also partakes of the nature of a letter to a customer, inasmuch as the agent is at the same time a valued patron of the house which he represents. This letter must avoid the one extreme of being a form letter, or one that is sent under "Falling off in trade" conditions to all agents, and at the same time avoid the other extreme of being too complimentary, too familiar, and betraying too accurate a knowledge of the agent's business. The agent must be made to feel that he is a most essential unit in the business organization; that his importance is duly recognized by the house; and that he being an employé—so to speak

—of the house, is to be held accountable by them for the results of his agency.

Where system finds the most practical application is in the handling of inquiries to the house, from customers in an agent's territory. There are two conditions which may come about in a case of this kind; first, where an arrangement exists by which both the house and the agent may bid for the prospect's trade, and second, where the agent is jealous of the incroachment of the house on his territory.

In either case a smoothly working system is called for. The principal mechanical detail to be guarded against is the "lost motion" on the part of the house in soliciting the prospect when he has become a customer through the operation of either the house or the agent, when both are bidding for his trade.

If an arrangement with an agent makes it obligatory—as it often does—that a prospect in a territory be handled by the agent, it means that the firm must write the prospect a letter referring him to the agent, write the agent of the existence of the prospect and follow up the prospect from the house.

An example of a form letter to the prospect turning him over to the branch office or local agency follows:

> Your inquiry of ..... received at this office to-day.
>
> In order to take care of our increasing sales in your locality Messrs. ..... & ..... look after our interests there. They represent us in full and will be pleased to furnish you with prices, lists, and any information which we ourselves could give you, in a manner that can not help but be satisfactory to you.
>
> Your letter to us has therefore been referred

to them by the same mail that we are now writing you, with definite instructions to favor you in every way possible.

We shall watch the progress of your inquiry carefully and are satisfied that we can give you the best service through the coöperation of our agent at .....

Thanking you very much for your inquiry and trusting that this is the beginning of the most pleasant business relations, we are,

Yours most sincerely,

The letter to the agent sent at the same time will read as follows:

Gentlemen:—

We are turning over to you the inquiry given on the bottom of this sheet and request that you will see that it is attended to at once. If possible secure their business. If not possible to do this you may be able to lay the foundation for business from them in the future.

Please acknowledge receipt of this notification and later let us know what steps you have taken to secure their business and what was the result of such action.

Our first follow-up letter, copy of which you have, will be sent them in 10 days from this communication.

Yours,

This letter should be accompanied by a copy of the original letter; the inquiry should be retained by the company's files. If the inquiry is short it may be placed on the bottom of the sheet, indeed it is preferable that it be so arranged, as it saves an extra sheet for filing and consequently lessens the chance for loss or misplacement.

If so desired a regular "Inquiry referred" form as shown, may be used.

Where diplomatic requirements call for it, the letter should be used, if the agent would feel slighted or would not give as close attention to a form notification as to one sent by letter. Usually the agent can be made to understand that it is not necessary to write him the same letter every time a prospect is turned

J. DOE & CO. CHICAGO.

INQUIRY NO. 2742

TO_____

_____

GENTLEMEN:

PLEASE GIVE INQUIRY PROMPT ATTENTION. REPORT US AS TO RESULT OF YOUR EFFORTS. OUR FOLLOW-UP WILL GO OUT IN_ _ _ _ _ _ _DAYS

THE FOLLOWING INQUIRY IS REFERRED TO YOU:

J. DOE COMPANY

BY_____

"Inquiry Referred" form

over to him and will realize the labor-saving side of the uniform form notification.

**Interference to be Guarded Against**

The follow-up letter which issues from the house should be aggressively cordial, should above all things not smack of the form letter, and should be carefully used so as not to be sent after a sale has been made by an agent, as it will impress the customer with the laxness of the system in use between the house and its agencies. This should be carefully watched for and avoided by impressing the local agent with the importance of prompt

reports on sales in hand and sales made. And it is almost superfluous to add that the time the agency is put in is the time to impress this upon the agent.

The agent should be informed of the follow-up system used by the house, be given copies of the follow-up letters sent out, so that he will not feel that it is the design of the house to do anything but coöperate with the agency in sending out the follow-up.

A general form for a follow-up letter is here shown. It should be made somewhat more specific whenever the scope or organization of the business will permit:

> Your inquiry to us under date of ....., referring to ....., was turned over, as we notified you, to our ..... agency.
>
> Not having heard from them we conclude that your order is still deferred for some reason or other.
>
> We know that we are able to satisfy any demand that you may have for goods in our line and that our organization is such that we are able to supply you promptly.
>
> Please advise us if your treatment by our gency has been satisfactory to you and if we can supplement their service in any way to assist you in your business.
>
> Thanking you for any information that will enable us to coöperate with you in obtaining the best possible service from our agency, we remain,
>
> Yours most sincerely,

One of the most important functions of the follow-up letter is to impress the customer with the fact that his inquiry is referred for the good of the customer. There may be and sometimes are, however, local reasons why the country customer may not wish to trade with the agent. When this is the case special attention should be given the matter.

If a large number of prospectives are turned over to a branch house or agency a blanket inquiry may often be called for at the beginning or end of the month. The following is given as a suggestive, short, and comprehensive form:

Gentlemen:—

During the month of ..... we referred the following inquiries to you. We have placed opposite the name of each inquiry the disposal as regards your office as far as the notifications from you have been received.

Will you please inform us if our records are complete as regards the disposal of these prospects:

1. Fred J. Davis & Co., Elgin, July 1st. Sold July 5th.
2. F. F. Davidson, Peoria, July 1st. Sold July 7th.
3. Hilton & Co., Springfield, July 10th. No report.
4. M. E. Woods, Springfield, July 20th. No report.
5. Standard Mfg. Co., Elgin, July 22nd. No report.

Thanking you for your early attention, we remain,

Yours,

---

## INTERHOUSE CORRESPONDENCE

### PART II

### BY HENRY W. BELFIELD

There is a well-known business phrase, "Mislaid correspondence," which is often connected with loss of trade and money. Sometimes it means merely what it

says; sometimes it means that some clerk has wilfully destroyed papers. Perhaps most often is this phrase used in correspondence between the home office and branch houses, office and factory, office and salesmen, for there is a certain kind of clerk who seems to believe that anything which is "only company business" can be neglected to any extent. It was to obviate this trouble that the following system was devised, and its efficiency has been demonstrated by its marked success in several institutions.

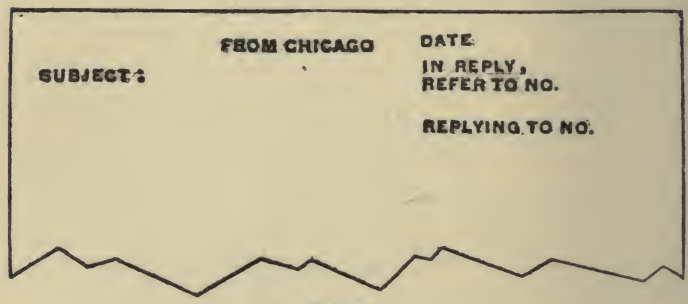



Figure I

The system, in a word, consists of writing letters in triplicate, leaving triplicate copy for a complete record for the issuing house, duplicate copy for the records of the receiving house, and original copy for routing to person who is to act upon it. This means that every employé of both offices has reference to the full text of each letter written between them, as soon as sent, in the one case, and received, in the other. There is no necessity of keeping the original letter accessible constantly, and the greatest obstacle to the successful operation of the vertical filing system—namely, the difficulty of getting letters returned to file promptly,

has no force here, for the time when the original letter reaches final file is of very little importance.

**What to Cut Out**

In the first place, all unnecessary courtesy, such as "Fred Brown & Co.," "Gentlemen," "Yours very truly," and other phrases are omitted entirely. In a business where hundreds and sometimes thousands of interhouse letters are written daily the saving of time is considerable. Next, an expensive letterhead is done away with, and

| Date | By whom | To New York - | No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8/3 | F W K | Supply orders neglected | 126. |
| 8 | G H J | Hurry order 4289. | 146. |
| 3 | T H M | Request for order blanks | 154. |
| 8/4 | J H W | Castings on order 4184 | 166 |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Figure II

this also is a factor in reducing expense. The blank (Figure I) is made with simply the words, "From Chicago," "From Atlanta," or whatever may be the name of the town where the letter is written, printed in the upper left-hand corner, and underneath the word, "Subject." In the upper right-hand corner is the serial number of the letter and the words, "In reply refer to No." and "Replying to No." It will thus be seen that the only typewriting necessary in addressing a letter consists of the location of the house to which the letter

is to be sent, a short summary of the matter contained in the letter for indexing purposes, the number of the letter, and date, with the initials of the writer, and the number and date of the letter which is under reply (in case there has been previous correspondence), with the initials of the former correspondent.

The blank is made in three sections, all exactly alike, with perforations, so that the three copies may be separated at need. The letter is thus written in tripli-

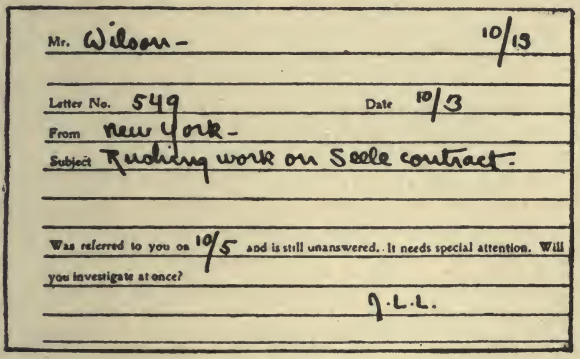
| Date | Byelow | From Atlanta | No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8/5 | F A M | Balance in bank | 289 |
| 5 | J M C | Credit scheme | 291 |
| 5 | J W K | Hold reports. | 337 |
| 8/6 | F A M | Statement of acct. | 353. |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Figure III

cate and a fourth copy usually made separate from the blank, to be pinned to the correspondence. After the letter has been written and signed, it is sent complete to the outgoing mail department, where the triplicate is detached and retained there, and, as soon as possible, indexed on cards (Figure II), either numerically under date, or, if there are sufficient number of letters, under subject-matter headings, varying according to the nature of the business, and bound numerically in book form by means of the loose-leaf device. Each branch

house, of course, has a separate set of cards, which may be distinguished by color or any other suitable differentiation.

The original and duplicate of the letter are forwarded at once to their destination. Upon arrival there the initials of the former letter (if any) will determine the routing, which is copied upon the duplicate. The original is then sent to the proper person and the duplicate retained, indexed on cards (Figure III) similar to those in Figure II, thus obviating any delay to the


Mr. Wilson - 10/13

Letter No. 549 Date 10/3

From New York -

Subject Routing work on Steele contract -

Was referred to you on 10/5 and is still unanswered. It needs special attention. Will you investigate at once?

J.L.L.

Figure IV

original, and also bound in book form. Also, the number of the replying letter just received may be noted on the triplicate copy of the former letter.

**Some of the Advantages of the System**

The chief advantage of this device is obviously the fact that the correspondence on any subject can not get lost, for should the original letters be misplaced the duplicates are instantly available, and contain all necessary information that may be desired by the correspondent.

A tickler can be readily worked by annotating the

duplicate with the number of its reply, so that a few minutes' perusal each morning will give a list of the unanswered letters of importance. The routing is on the duplicate, so that a form (Figure IV) may be sent to the person or department to whom the original was forwarded. The importance of keeping correspondence up is too well known to be commented upon here.

The method of filing the triplicate copy of the outgoing letter is flexible. A feasible plan for doing away with indexing them is to have a loose-leaf binder for the letters to each house and to file each day's letters, numerically, under classes of correspondence—that is, have a division in the binder for clerical letters, for administrative letters, for financial letters, for salesmen's letters, etc., as the particular business demands. A person looking up correspondence has one prime thought, not who wrote it, nor the serial number, but what is the subject-matter. The current binder would hold two weeks' or two months' correspondence, depending on the volume of business, and if one could approximate at all closely the date of the letter in which he was interested, its location would be easy.

The blank is, of course, expensive, but, counted against the cost of the letterhead and extra typewriting, in the end often costs less than the usual system. The value of the results may be reckoned in thousands of dollars.

## INTER-DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION

PART III

BY KENDALL BANNING

Among many large business houses which handle several hundred or several thousand letters daily, the problem of assigning communications to the proper departments or individuals is a task which each house has to solve on the basis of its own particular needs.

One of the simplest yet most effective of the systems for controlling such correspondence, is now in use by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, of New York, whose scheme, either in its present form or with modifications, may be used to advantage by practically all business houses whose employés number fifty or more.

**Use of a Cabinet**

On the desks of each of the heads of departments in the executive offices, of each of the superintendents of agencies, and of each of the heads of the audit divisions, one of which is connected with each of these agencies, is a small cabinet divided into three sections, each section containing ten pockets, arranged in ascending tiers as shown in the accompanying illustration. Each pocket contains a number of sheets of paper at the top of which are printed the names of the executive and departmental heads, together with their titles. One section is devoted to sheets bearing the names of the heads of the departments in the executive offices; one tier to the ten superintendents of agencies, and one tier to the ten heads of the audit divisions.

All correspondence from outside sources, which is

intended for the notice of more than one department, and all communications from one department to another, such as directions for the disposition of requests, complaints, orders, or requisitions, are noted on the forms bearing the names of the officials to whom the


Correspondence tray

attached communications are to be forwarded. These communications are then placed in a basket intended for out-going communications. These baskets are emptied at regular intervals during the day by messengers who take the contents of these baskets to a cen-

tral point from which they are distributed to the addresses.

On the desk of each superintendent of agencies is a similar file containing forms bearing the names of the agents in his particular department. In the same way each head of the audit divisions operates this file in his own department. From the President of the company down to the head of the smallest department, similar provision is made for the reference of communications to every employé in the company to whom business correspondence or orders are sent.

This system is just as applicable to manufacturing houses, retail houses, banking houses, publishing houses, and railroad companies, as to insurance companies. One tier of pockets in every case would be devoted to the main executives of the company; the remaining tiers may be devoted to factory foremen or heads of store or banking departments just as aptly as to superintendents of agencies.

This system is of particular value in that it states explicitly the name of the person or persons to whom the communication is to be sent, together with full directions for the disposition of the attached matter without marking or defacing the communications to which the slips are attached—a valuable feature to the filing department whose aim it is to keep all filed communications as clean as possible.

The system may be further modified by a larger or smaller number of pockets in each tier, and by a larger or smaller number of tiers to suit the conditions which the system has to meet.

# PART III

# SYSTEM IN HANDLING CORRESPONDENCE

# CHAPTER XV

## THE USE AND OPERATION OF THE FOLLOW-UP

BY C. C. PARSONS

*Of the Shaw-Walker Company*

The term follow-up system designates a system devoted to following up correspondence and increasing business either with those who are already customers or with prospective customers. But the same terms and the same principles which apply to the following up of correspondence may also similarly be applied to collections, the delivery of orders, or receipts of goods which have been purchased.

The follow-up system must accomplish two things, and these in the shortest manner possible:

**The Purpose of the Follow-up**

First, everything which must be attended to on a certain day must be brought to the attention on that day and at no other time, and there must be no possibility of any hint or inquiry which may be developed into an order being lost.

Second, it must be possible to locate all the information immediately whenever it is necessary.

For example, the day I receive an inquiry from a prospective customer, John Jones, in regard to goods, perhaps I send a catalogue and call his attention to some particular items of interest. In case no reply is received within ten days, I wish to write again and follow up my first letter. At the end of ten days, this inquiry—together with others which must be attended to on that particular date—must be brought to my

attention and no others. It should never be necessary to go through all the correspondence or all the files to find a particular letter; but in case John Jones writes me before the ten days have expired, it must be possible to instantly locate all his correspondence.

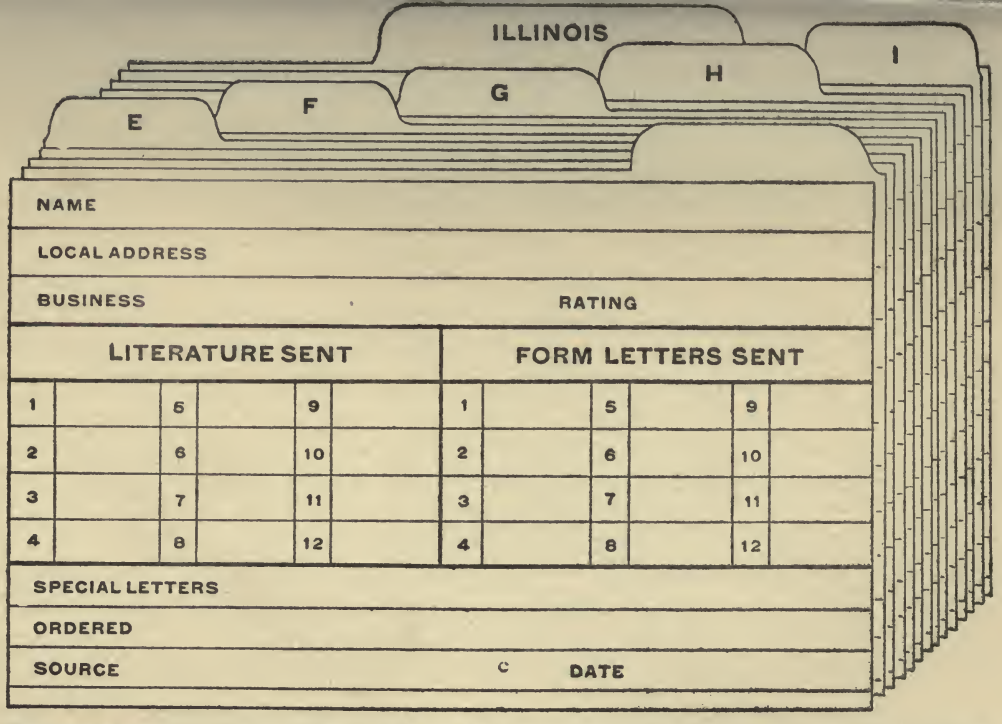
**The Old Follow-Up—How Operated**

The old idea used to be to make out two cards at the time an inquiry was received. One of these was filed under the day and month when the next letter should be written in case a reply was not received; the other was filed alphabetically by the name of the person, and on it was entered the date to which the other card was filed. The correspondence itself was filed alphabetically. In case a reply was received before the anticipated date, it was necessary to refer to the alphabetical file to find the date, to remove the card from the daily file and to locate the correspondence alphabetically. In case no reply was received, all the cards for one date, in the daily file, as for instance the 10th, were taken out, the corresponding alphabetical cards were located and the correspondence taken from the correspondence file.

Modern follow-up systems have eliminated part of this work. One card is easily made to do the work of these two.

**Devising a Suitable System**

The manner in which a follow-up system for any business should be devised depends primarily upon whether the correspondence is necessary in following up the inquiry. In certain classes of business where a single article is being sold, as a penholder, book, or inkwell, there is no particular necessity to refer to the previous correspondence, as every inquiry must contain but one thing. In another class of business where several lines are handled and several articles or a high-priced arti-




The simplest form of follow-up; these cards are filed alphabetically under the name; they may in turn be indexed under states to further classify the list; the printing on the front card in this and the other two files shown serve as examples of the various ways in which the card itself may be made up

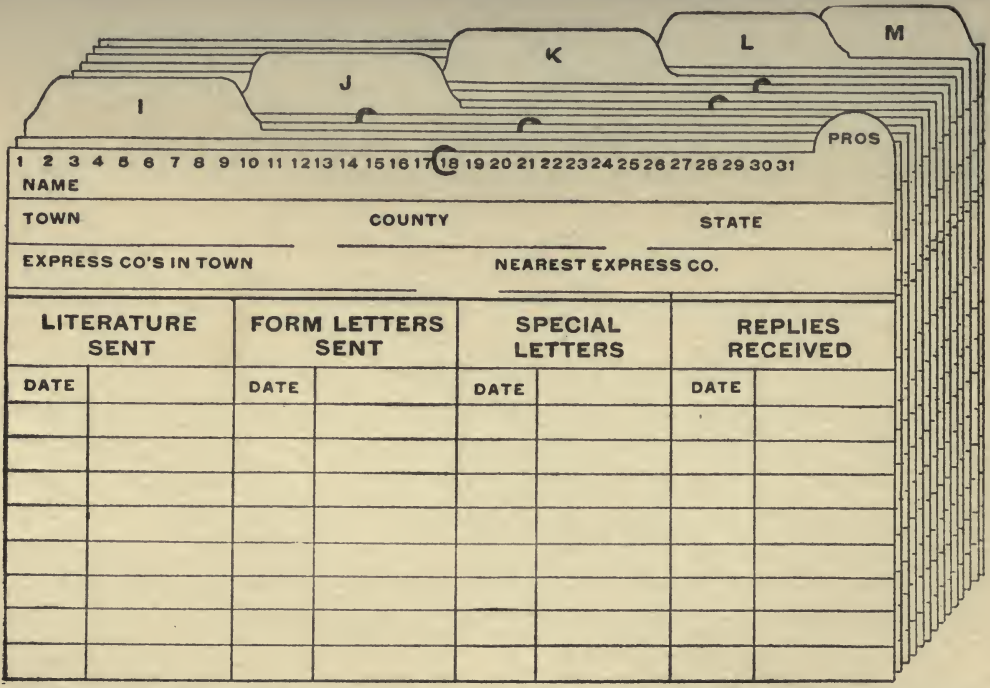
cle involving peculiar conditions for each buyer are being sold, it will be necessary to refer to the previous correspondence in order to intelligently answer any letter which may be received, or to intelligently follow up the inquiry.

In case reference to the correspondence is necessary, the correspondence itself can be made to take place of the card which was formerly filed by months and days.

When an inquiry is received a card is made out containing the name and address of the inquirer and any other information which may be necessary; on this card is also noted the date on which a letter has been written and the date to which the correspondence is to be filed, so that the matter may again be brought up in case no reply is received.

If it is not necessary to refer to the correspondence —if general form letters are used in the follow-up work —a quicker method than using the correspondence to assist in the follow-up is to continue the follow-up with the alphabetical card. Each card contains the name of one customer or prospective customer, the address and all necessary information—as to the catalogues, form letters, and so on, that have been sent out; on it is also noted the date on which it is desired to follow up in case no reply is received.

The simplest way to distinguish between customers and prospective customers is to use different colored cards. The only objection to this method is that, when prospectives become customers, it is necessary to rewrite the information. A better scheme is to make up the prospective customer's card with a small tab on the upper right-hand corner marked "P." When this prospect becomes a customer, the tab can be cut off



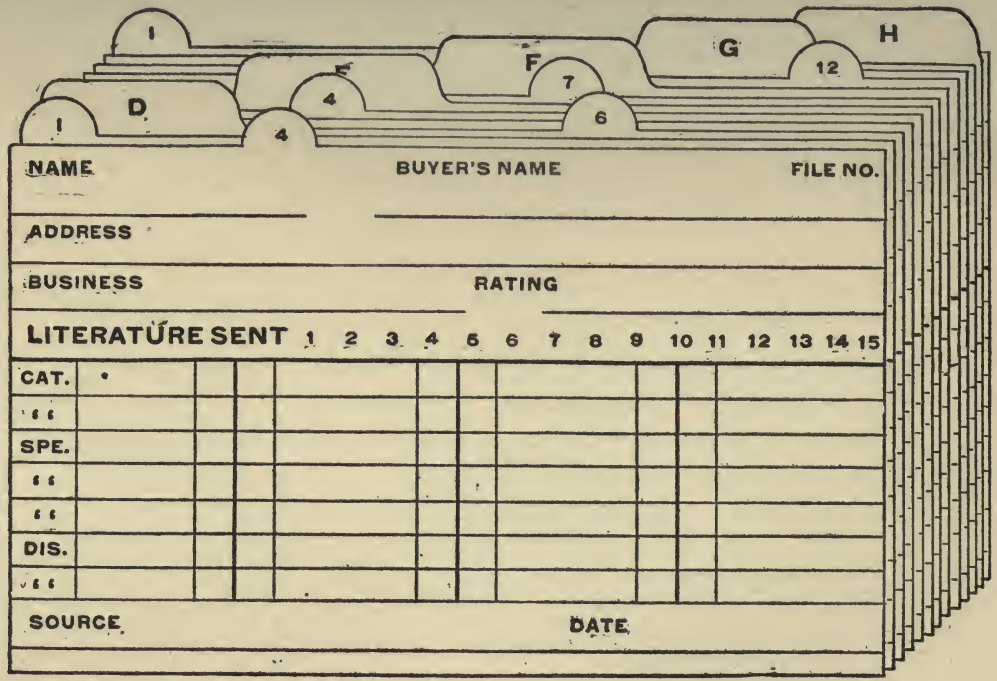

This file shows the alphabetical arrangement together with the date clips which make the card a follow up also; the front card has the "prospect tab" on it; when this man becomes a customer the tab need merely be cut off

This makes it possible to file customers and prospective customers in the same drawer—often a desirable thing in case the whole list is circularized periodically.

In order to distinguish between the different classes of business, cards should be made with tabs in different positions, each position designating some particular business. A tab in the first position, for instance, may be used to represent wholesale druggists; a tab in the second position, physicians; in the third position, department stores. This becomes a service in case it is desired to send special advertising to particular classes. If, for instance, I have a large mixed list, but wish to circularize department stores with some special literature, it is only necessary to instruct the addresser to send such circulars to those cards only which have number three tab.

These tabs on the cards do not interfere with the metal tabs which are used in the follow-up, because on any card the permanent tab takes up only one-tenth of the space across the top. If, for instance, it has become necessary to follow up a card with the tab in the first position, on the first date the tab would come directly over the one. In such case as this the metal tab is to be put over the next number, as in any follow-up system one or two days does not usually matter. In case it does, however, it is possible to escape even this slight objection; the permanent tabs may occupy only the left hand of the tops of the cards and the figures for the dates can be printed on the right, so that there will be no conflict between the permanent and adjustable tabs.

The correspondence constitutes the follow-up; it is placed in a file arranged with monthly and daily




This file shows how the classes of business may be designated by numbered tabs on the cards; these cards may also have the dates printed across the tops and be used for follow-up purposes

guides on the date to which attention is to be brought to the particular matter.

This system is particularly adapted to special follow-ups in any department of the business, as in buying or collections, and will apply to cases where personal letters are written to follow up instead of the ordinary form letters. It is appropriate for a large system as well as a small one, for, if under any one date there is a large number of letters, in order to insure quicker references these can be filed alphabetically under that date.

In case a reply to a lettter is received before the anticipated date, reference is made, first, to the card in the alphabetical file, and from the information on this correspondence is easily located in the correspondence file of any particular date. The month and date file will then contain only the correspondence of those people who have not written. Each letter to come up that day will be taken out, the alphabetical cards will be attached to the correspondence—to afford full information on the previous history of this case—and the whole given to the person who is handling this special correspondence.

Along the top of the card are printed the days of the month from one to thirty-one; and over the number corresponding to the date on which the card is to be brought up for attention, a metal clip is placed. The metal clips for the cards which are to be followed on any date will come in a direct line and consequently all the cards for one date can be easily located and taken from the file.

In case a reply is received before the expected date, the card is readily located because it is filed alphabetically; the matter can be attended to and the metal clip

can be moved forward to the next date on which the card is to be followed up.

It is possible to adapt either of these two systems to the most complex conditions which may arise in any office.

It may be desired, for instance, to classify the different inquiries or customers according to the nature of the business, or to the nature of their interest; or to distinguish between actual and prospective customers.

The possible ramifications, modifications and extensions of the follow-up in its application to varying specific conditions are infinite, the system as here given being adaptable to perhaps any conditions which can arise.

# CHAPTER XVI

## A FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM FOR THE MANUFACTURER

BY C. C. PARSONS

*Of the Shaw-Walker Company*

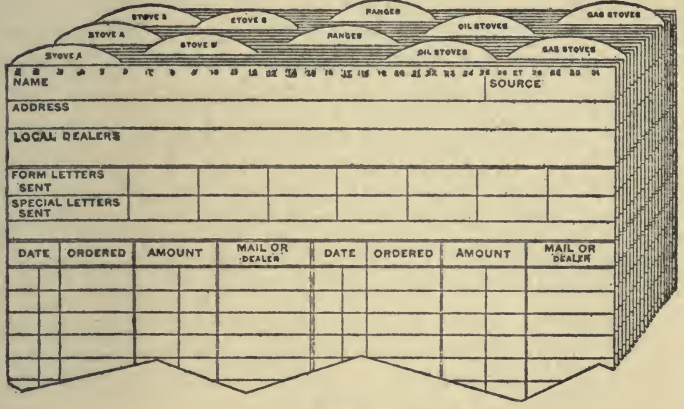
The system herewith described is in use in a large manufacturing house and is particularly interesting and valuable because it includes almost all points which a follow-up system may cover.

A follow-up system is first of all an index to a list of names; in this system the names are indexed geographically according to the state and the town in which the prospect lives. A follow-up's next function is to automatically bring up for attention the names in the list on certain dates; this is accomplished in this system by means of tabs placed on the card. A mailing list usually includes both prospective customers and old customers; they are filed altogether in this system, the prospects being distinguished from the customers by having a tab at one end of the card. And lastly, a follow-up list may be classified according to the kind of goods or kinds of business; the system accomplishes this by having the cards classified according to the goods inquired for, by means of tabs.

Inquiries are received either in reply to advertisements or circular letters sent out, from dealers, or from salesmen. In every case such an inquiry has particular reference to some one article on the manufacturer's list. As each is received, the inquiry is

entered upon a card such as shown in the illustration; (Form I) the name and address is entered, its source and the name of the local dealer, if the house has one in that town.

Cards are provided with five kinds of tabs corresponding with the five lines that the house manufactures. A card is selected bearing that tab which corresponds with the article inquired for by the prospect.




Form I

These cards are then placed in a file, which is indexed geographically, first by states and under the states by towns; the towns under each state are arranged alphabetically and are divided by guide cards. The cards under each town are arranged alphabetically, according to the name of the prospect; if the number of names in any one town warrants it guide cards may be provided.

The state and town cards should be of different

colors in order to avoid any confusion in the name. It is also advisable to have the letters on the guide cards dividing the names printed smaller to distinguish them from the guide cards dividing the towns.

**Geographical Arrangement**

A geographical arrangement is most convenient for a very large list because it divides and classifies the names more conveniently. It is especially adapted to manufacturers' or wholesalers' lists, because as a rule these wish to keep track of their business by localities. A manufacturer may sell the local dealers; he then wants to have all the prospects and customers in a certain locality together. It also enables the house to give the salesman the names of all prospects in his territory, or check up the amount of sales which his efforts are bringing in.

If a list is purely local, or if these geographical considerations bring no advantage, the index may be arranged alphabetically.

**Series Follow-Ups**

A series of form letters is provided for each class of inquiries—that is, for each line of goods sold—so that when once a man inquires regarding any particular article, he can be followed up specifically on that article by means of the forms. Each follow-up letter is given a guide number or sign, which distinguished it from every other. Suppose, for instance, there are five follow-up letters on a "gas engine" inquiry; they can be marked "G. E. A.," "G. E. B.," "G. E. C," "G. E. D.," "G. E. E." This mark is placed in the lower left hand corner of the letter, where usually the correspondent's initials are written.

The inquirer's name once on the card, clerks can take care of the rest of the follow-up. The first letter

in the series is sent out immediately on receipt of the inquiry. A record to that effect is made on the card by writing the initials which identify the letter in the blank provided, opposite the words "Form letter sent."

These inquiries are usually followed up every ten days; therefore, supposing the first letter was sent out on the first day of the month, a tab would be placed over the "10" figure on the card. On the tenth day of the month the follow-up clerk takes out all the cards bearing tabs on this date. Inasmuch as the cards are all printed alike those bearing "10" tabs will all be in a straight line and can therefore, be very quickly picked out.

Glancing at the entry on each card opposite "Form letters sent," the clerk will find what letter was sent last; inasmuch as the letters are laid out in a regular series, and are numbered, the clerk will know which letter is to go out next. Record of the mailing of this letters will again be made on the card and the tab will be moved ahead another ten days to the 20th and the card placed in its regular geographical position.

**The Special Letter**

But if in the meantime this prospect has answered the first letter, his card is picked out of the file—very easily done since it is filed geographically —and attached to the letter. If this letter contains further inquiry, it is usually sent to a special correspondent who will dictate a special letter. A record of this will be made in the blanks opposite "special letters sent," and the card will be led ahead the proper number of days. If no further letter or order has been received, by the time it comes up again, the clerk again sends the card to the special correspondent; he may send another special

letter or he may direct that the regular series of form letters be continued.

When an order is received, the name is looked up in the file. If it is there, the date, amount of order and the article ordered are entered in the blanks provided, and the tab which indicates that this was a prospect is cut off to indicate that this man is now a customer. He is usually followed up at such regular intervals thereafter as the system may provide.

**Classifying Customers**

Customers are distinguished from prospects because different literature is usually sent out to the two classes. The tabs on the cards greatly simplify and facilitate this work, for when a clerk is taking off the names for mailing, he need not reach each card to ascertain whether an order has ever been received; the presence or absence of the prospect tab will tell him. Three reasons favor putting prospects and customers together in one file rather than in two. All the names are in one place; they can be circularized at one time. Secondly, all data necessary to judge of the trade in a given locality is in one place; if information is to be given to a dealer or salesman, it is not necessary to go to two places. Finally when an inquiry or order is received search for the proper card need be made only in the one file.

It is a question, however, whether it is not better to place customers' cards in another file when literature different from that sent to prospects is provided for them; for the five "article" tabs complicate the situation.

General literature is sent out to all prospects periodically, a special kind for each class of goods—that is, "pump" inquiries receive one booklet or cat-

alogue, "gas engine" another, and so on; in this work the class tabs are a great time saver.

The value of classifying the lists according to the kind of goods inquired about is plainly proved. A general form letter sent in response to all the inquiries could not be written to sound like a personal reply; it must touch on all articles instead of on merely the one. But if follow-up letters are gotten up for each article sold, the prospect can not distinguish them from personal letters, for they will follow right along the line of his inquiry. The tabs pay their cost in the saving of labor alone, which comes from the fact that the article inquired for need not be written on the card by the clerk; it is on the tab.

# CHAPTER XVII

## A SUBJECT INDEX FOR FILING CORRESPONDENCE

BY E. T. PAGE

*President and Secretary, The Page-Davis Company*

Certain broad principles regarding the filing of correspondence are coming to be generally recognized: that all the correspondence from one individual or firm should be filed in the same place, the last letter on top, with copies of the answers sent; that numerical filing, with an alphabetical index of the names of correspondents, is easier to handle and easier to locate, than correspondence filed alphabetically to begin with; that only one set of transfer files, so arranged as to be indefinitely expansible, should be provided; that some cross references from one set of correspondence to another, or from a name to a set of correspondence, is advisable.

Very few systems for filing correspondence go beyond this. And yet this is only the beginning. Suppose, for instance, a jobber wishes to know the trade conditions in a certain town. He knows that letters he has recently received from merchants in this town will give him such information. But how, except by the accident of some one's memory, is he going to know where to go for this information? He receives a letter from a merchant in a middle sized city, asking for quotations, and saying that he knows the quotations that his competitor is getting, and must have

at least as good or better. How is the manufacturer going to find the quotations which this competitor got? Again, suppose the manufacturer thinks that, judging by his correspondence for the past few months, he ought to send out a circular to every person who has asked concerning a certain kind of goods during the past four months. How is he going to find these names.

These are only a few of the instances, which might be expanded into a book, when the mere knowing of where a certain individual's correspondence is, is not enough—that individual's name not being known. An index system must go farther than this. The correspondence is the pulse of every business. Its subject matter is the motive for almost every move that is made in that business. Its contents are the goad, the stimulus, even the directing force, which lead the business man in his advance. And then to think, that this very subject matter, these contents, each and all are but a jumbled mass of material, once it has left the filing clerk's hand.

**The Vital Part—The Subject**

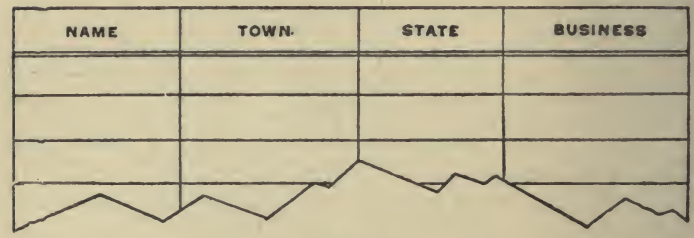
All correspondence should be indexed by subjects. Wishing to know the trade conditions in a town, the jobber should be able to turn to an alphabetical subject index at once, and looking under the name of the town and then under the words "trade conditions," get the exact letter or letters which he wants. Wishing to know the quotations he has made to a merchant in a certain city, he can turn to the city at once, and find what merchant there is his customer. If he wishes to send out a circular to all persons who have inquired about a certain class of goods, he should turn to this word in his

**What Can Be Found in a Subject Index**

index and find there the correspondents who have so inquired.

This indexing of every letter by every subject mentioned in it, may seem an almost impossible task. Using the proper system of indexing it is very simple. The system here described handles hundreds of letters daily, and yet the work is done by one clerk.

All the indexing, whether of the name and town of the correspondent, or of the subject concerning which he writes, is done in one book. This book is a bound volume, with alphabetical pads running down the out-




Form I

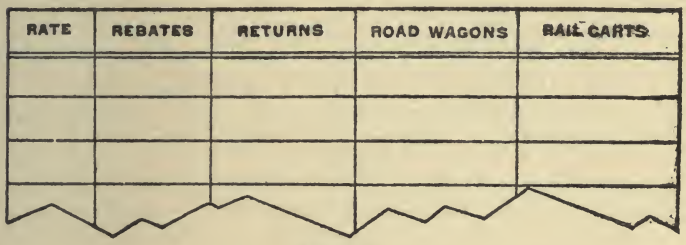
side margin, but is so made that, when it begins to fill up, it can be taken out of the binding, new leaves inserted where needed, and then rebound. It is really a loose-leaf volume, but the bound form is, of course, much easier to handle than loose sheets.

One or more sheets in this book are assigned to each letter of the alphabet. On each sheet (Form I) are certain blanks, for names, towns, states, etc.—that is, facts concerning the correspondents themselves, which will be classed under every letter of the alphabet. On the back of this sheet (Form II) those particular subjects in the correspondence itself which begin with this letter of the alphabet are indexed. In each busi-

ness there are usually a limited number of subjects concerning which all correspondents write. Only those subjects applying to the business in question will, naturally, be indexed on these sheets.

**Numbering the Communication**

Suppose, now, that a letter comes in from John Anderson, Bloomington, in which he inquires concerning prices, guarantees which are given with goods, and a request for samples. When the letter comes to the filing clerk to be filed, if this is the first letter from this man, he will first be given a number, say 105. This will not only be the number under which his correspondence




Form II

will be filed, all together and alphabetically, but it will also be his ledger number, should he ever open an account.

The clerk first turns to the A sheet in the index book, and enters in the name column the name John Anderson, placing after it the number 105, which indicates that this is the file number of the correspondent. In subsequent letters from this person, the name and address need, of course, not be entered again, since all correspondence goes in the same folder, 105. The clerk then turns to the B sheet and enters the name Bloomington in the name file, placing the file

number after it; then turns to the I sheet and enters Illinois in the state column with the same number. If the man's occupation, or any detail regarding him, is to be filed, this process is continued.

Then the clerk turns to the P page, and on the back of the sheet, in the column, Prices, simply enters the number, 105; he turns to the G sheet and the S sheet and makes similar entries. Of course, this whole process takes less time than to tell it.

Now suppose that the head of the concern wishes to know what rates he quoted to some man in Bloomington. Looking under the B sheet he will find in the town column Bloomington entered—perhaps several times with a number after each entry. He then turns to the R sheet and finds on the back the numbers of those persons to whom he has quoted rates. If any number in the Bloomington column agrees with a number in the R column, he knows that here is someone in Bloomington to whom he has quoted rates. The correspondence with this person can at once be taken down and examined.

**Finding Specific Information**

If he wishes to send circulars to all those who have requested samples in the last six months, he need only give this order to a clerk, who will look under the Sample column on the S sheet and find there certain numbers, which by looking up in the correspondent file he can find who has made such inquiries.

Such indexing of course takes some time. But it is a saving from the increased facility in circularizing alone, without considering the convenience to a business man of being able to know what someone has written about at some time or other, when he has forgotten the person entirely.

The same method can be followed in indexing letters sent out. To distinguish these entries from the subjects of letters received, it is only necessary to make them in a different colored pencil, and it can be determined at a glance whether a certain man wrote in about rates or was written to about rates.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## FILING AND FOLLOWING UP CORRESPONDENCE

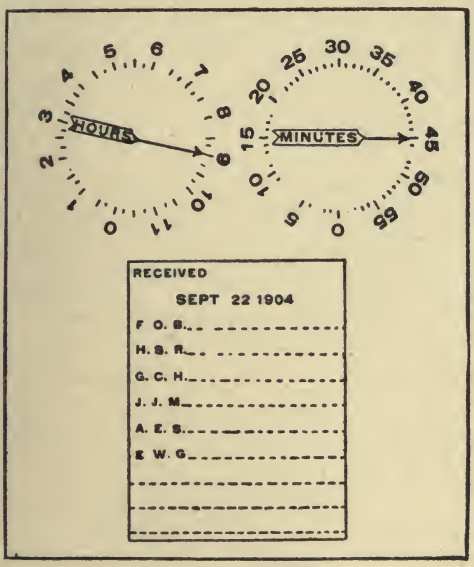
BY P. A. WETZEL

There is a pressing need for a system which combines; (1) Following up correspondence without requiring the work of a clerk to keep a "Follow-up" record and, (2) Filing it in a way that will facilitate ready reference to a standard correspondent's letters concentrated in one place for a certain period of time, without the loss of time or inconvenience involved in writing or referring to an index or handling another correspondent's matter. In outlining this system, we will embody all the features which, seem go to make up the fundamental principles of a good correspondence filing system, keeping in mind, however, that systems should be invented or modified to fit the specific requirements of the user.

Divide your vertical files for a state or alphabetical division dependent upon the nature and scope of your business and if the state classification is adopted, allot space according to the importance of the various states, reserving one or more files for your "Follow-up" department. Place alphabets, properly sub-divided, behind each state guide, or have the names of towns written on guides, lettering the towns rank in their alphabetical order (you are in a better position to know which of these principles is the most adapted to your business).

**Best Scheme of Classification**

As a general principle for concerns conducting a business not local, especially for manufacturers or wholesale houses, the town arrangement is to be recommended, because it is the most far-reaching classification and concentrates all correspondence from a town in one place, which is an important advantage for general reference




Form 1

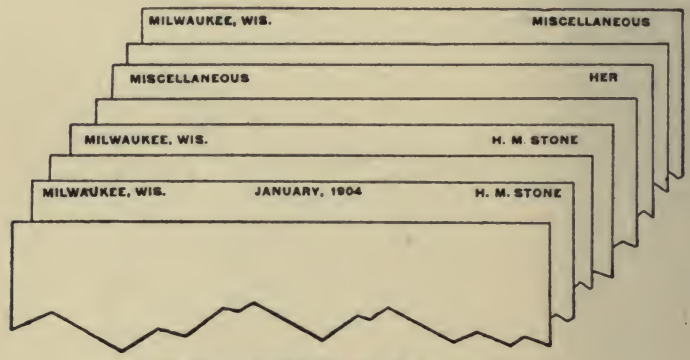
and for writing to traveling representatives concerning complete trade conditions at any point. It will also allow salesmen to get a general insight into matters customers have written about in their respective territories during the salesman's absence from headquarters.

Put a set of date guides and a set of month guides

in the files allotted to the "Follow-up" department. The date guides will represent the current month.

A stamp, Form I, should be used by the person having the responsibility of opening and distributing the mail, on every letter to designate the date and time was received and the initials of the correspondents who are to give it attention.

Take carbon copies of all letters and when correspondence is to be followed-up, make two carbon copies on different colored paper. Note the date, you wish




Form V (bottom folder in file)
Form II (second folder in file)
Form IV (third folder in file)
Form III (last folder in file)

to write the next letter on one carbon copy so that the filing clerk can file it before the proper date in the "Follow-up" department of the files.

The filing clerk should paste the regular carbon copies to the original letters—this abolishes the pin and fastener nuisance and if it is desirable to file correspondence by subjects, all letters and carbon copies pertaining to a subject should be pasted together.

The class of correspondence coming from cus-

tomers or correspondents who write frequently, we will designate as "Standard and Customers" correspondence. Write the names of correspondents in the "Standard and Customers" class in the upper right corner of a square cut folder, (Form II), with the name of their town and state in the left corner and file the folder before the town guide, or if you do not adopt the town arrangement, file the folder in front of the alphabetical sub-division of the state. If a concern's correspondence becomes heavy enough, give it a folder for each month.

**Correspondence Classified**

REQUISITION FOR CORRESPONDENCE

DATE _____

| DATE | SUBJECTS | WITH |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Form VI

All "Miscellaneous" correspondence which is not worthy of name or folder treatment, should be filed, provided you adopt the town arrangement, in a folder marked "Miscellaneous" in the right corner and the name of the town and state in the left corner, see Form III, and this folder should be filed before the town guide. If you adopt the state arrangement with an alphabet for each state, this correspondence should be filed in a folder marked "Miscellaneous" in the left corner, with the sub-division of the alphabet corresponding with

**Use of the "Miscellaneous" Folder**

the guide it is to be filed with, in the right corner, see Form IV. When "Miscellaneous" correspondence becomes heavy, it should be separated into folders with months written upon them, see Form V. Fix upon a number of letters that will transform a "Miscellaneous" correspondent to a "Standard" correspondent and instruct the filing clerk to be governed accordingly, while the correspondence is in the files.

THIS IS TO OCCUPY THE PLACE IN FILE FROM WHICH THE CORRESPONDENCE HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN

RECORD OF CORRESPONDENCE WITHDRAWN FROM FILES

| DATE WITH DRAWN | CORRESPONDENCE FROM | DATE OF COR. | SUBJECT | WITHDRAWN BY | RETURNED DATE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Form VII

When the business is extensive enough to warrant it, use the printed blank, see Form VI, for a requisition to the filing clerk for correspondence taken away from the files, and Form VII, for a record to occupy the place in the files, from which correspondence has been withdrawn. This avoids giving the impression that correspondence has not been received when it is away from the files, and avoids delay and loss of time, in locating it.

# CHAPTER XIX

## A SYSTEM FOR HANDLING CORRESPONDENCE

### BY A COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

### I. GENERAL RULES

1. All correspondence is to be filed in vertical drawer files.

2. Folders are to be the standard 9⅜x11⅞ inches, seventy-pound manila folders, with ½-inch projecting tabs. Guides are to be the standard 9⅜x11⅞ inches 240-pound cardboard, with ¾-inch projecting tabs.

3. On all folders must be stamped with rubber stamps the name of the department to which the correspondence in the folder belongs.

4. The correspondence of the company is to be filed in three divisions:

The correspondence of the retail department is to be filed alphabetically.

The correspondence of the wholesale department is to be filed geographically.

The correspondence of the advertising department is to be filed numerically.

### II. ALPHABETICAL FILES OF THE RETAIL DEPARTMENT[1]

The volume of correspondence in this department would seem to require a 540-division alphabetical index.

All firms or individuals with whom considerable

[1] The alphabetical method of filing was probably recommended for this department rather than the geographical, because its business is confined to one city, and rather than the numerical, inasmuch as its correspondence includes many houses, but is probably light with any one of them.—*Editor.*

correspondence is carried on are to be assigned a folder. This folder is to contain on the projecting edge the year, the name and the address of the firm.

The correspondence of those parties in each division of the index with whom little correspondence is carried on is to be included in the miscellaneous folder. The miscellaneous folder, which is to be of colored stock, blue by preference, is to contain on the projecting edge the word "miscellaneous" and the year.

All folders concerning correspondence are to be filed in front of the guide for that division.

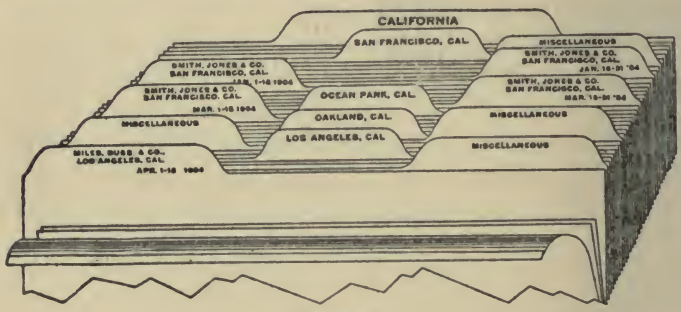



Figure I

"Miscellaneous" folders are to be filed directly in front of the guide, the individual folders in front of the "miscellaneous" folder.

## III. GEOGRAPHICAL FILES OF WHOLESALE DEPARTMENT[1]

State guide cards are to serve as the first division. In Figure I is shown the arrangement of guides and

[1] The geographical arrangement was probably used in this case for the reason that, when business is spread over a large territory, it is of great convenience to the management in many ways to have the correspondence, records and data of any district in one place. As far as locating it is concerned, it is as easy to find letters filed by this plan as by either of the others.—*Editor.*

folders. As in the alphabetical index, firms with which correspondence is heavy are to have individual folders. On the projecting edge of the folder is to be written the name of the individual or firm, the town and the state. These folders are to be filed in alphabetical order in front of the proper state guide, according to towns. For transient correspondence there is to be a "miscellaneous" folder filed directly in front of the state guide.

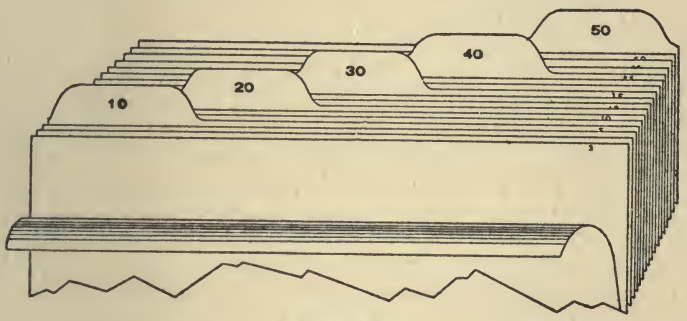
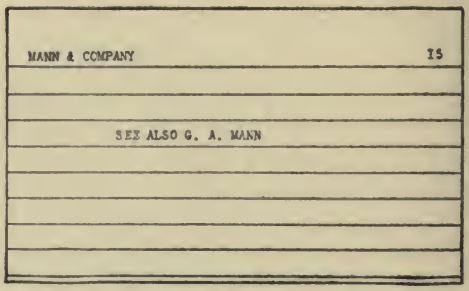



Figure II

If the correspondence for any town is large, it will be necessary to insert a town guide in front of the proper state guides; the correspondence for that town will then be filed in its folders, arranged alphabetically, in front of the town guide, and the rest of the correspondence for that state back of this town guide. If there are two or more town guides inserted in front of a single state guide, they should be filed with reference to one another in alphabetical order.

## IV. NUMERICAL FILES OF THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT[1]

Each correspondent is to have a folder bearing a consecutive number of a series which progresses by units. The number is to be indicated on the projecting edge of the folder. In case the correspondence is so heavy that the folder becomes full before the regular time of transfer, two or more folders bearing the same number may be used. Upon each folder will then be




Form III

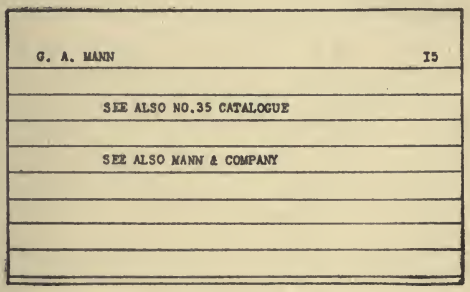
written the months whose correspondence that folder contains (Figure II).

Guides are to be numbered by tens. The first four cuts of one-fifth the cut guides are to be used. All folders are to be filed in front of the ten which follows their unit, as, for example, folders 21 to 30 will be filed in front of guide 30.

[1] The advertising department of a house usually does business with concerns scattered irregularly over the country. It corresponds with relatively few people, but its correspondence is usually large and permanent with each of them. It was doubtless these considerations that led to the recommendation of this method of filing for the advertising department.—*Editor*

## V. INDEXING THE NUMERICAL ARRANGEMENT

The names of the correspondents on the numerical files are to be indexed alphabetically by a card index. Cards of two colors, as white and salmon, are to be used, filed with index cards of buff or blue. White cards are to be used to indicate the names of corporations, firms, partnerships (Form III). Salmon cards are to be used to indicate the names of individuals connected with partnerships (Form IV). Each card is




Form IV

to bear in its upper right-hand corner the number of the folder containing the correspondence to which it refers.

Correspondents are to be cross-indexed as follows: Jones & Co. of Jonesborough, Ark., have connected with their firm John Jones, Frank Smith, Henry Brown. A white card will be made out for Jones & Co. as shown in Form III.

John Jones, Frank Smith, Henry Brown will each be indexed on a salmon card, as indicated in Form IV.

The correspondence of the individuals connected

with the firm is always to be filed in the same folder as the regular correspondence of the firm. The cross-index cards of these individuals will show who these firms are and where their correspondence is filed.

The clerk who cares for the index file should use care to catch all names of new individuals connected with corporations, companies, partnerships, etc., and to make cross-index cards for them promptly.

## VI. TRANSFERRING CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence is to be transferred once each year. In the alphabetical files, new folders are to be

REQUISITION FOR CORRESPONDENCE

DATE _____

| DATE | SUBJECTS | WITH |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Form V

provided on the first of January of each year, and all correspondence for the current year is to be filed in the new indexes. The old folders are to remain in the cases until July 1. On this date all of the past year's correspondence is to be transferred to transfer cases or other convenient files. This plan leaves at least six months' correspondence in the files at all times for reference.

The numerical transfer is to be effected in similar manner; new folders are to be provided on the first of January for the correspondence of the coming year,

and each is to be inserted directly behind the folder containing the previous year's correspondence. The current year will be stamped on the index card at the time the new folder is inserted. For example, Jones & Co., who are No. 25, have been in correspondence with the firm during 1904. As soon as a letter is received after the first of January, 1905, a new folder numbered No. 25 will be placed directly behind the one for the previous year in the same file. "1905" is stamped on the index card at the same time. On the first of July all of the folders for the previous year are taken out and filed numerically, as before, in transfer cases.

## VII. HANDLING OF UNFILED CORRESPONDENCE

Each person in the office is to be assigned a number; for example, Mr. George 1, Mr. Williams 2, Mr. Roberts 3. The correspondence is to be opened by the incoming mail clerk, who will sort the correspondence for the different departments into baskets or trays, placing upon the upper right-hand corner of each letter the number of the correspondent to whom the mail is to be referred. If a letter has to be referred to more than one correspondent, the numbers of all the several correspondents are to be indicated on the letter by the incoming mail clerk, the numbers of the correspondents appearing on the letter in the order in which they are to be delivered. Each correspondent, as he answers letters referred to his department, is to place his initials over his number. If he wishes to refer letters to departments which have not been indicated by the incoming mail clerk, he is to do so by indicating the number in the same manner as the mail clerk would do.

Each correspondent is to have about his desk three baskets or receptacles for holding mail, plainly marked "New Mail," "File" and "Messenger," respectively. The new correspondence delivered him by the incoming mail clerk will be placed in the "New Mail" basket. Correspondence which he has attended to and which is ready for filing the correspondent is to place in the "File" basket, from which it will be gathered and delivered to the filing clerk by office boys periodically during the day. Letters which the correspondent wishes to refer to some other person or department he is to place in the "Messenger" basket, whose contents will be collected periodically, sorted and redelivered.

The incoming mail clerk is to keep a record of letters received by counting the envelopes. The envelopes are to be preserved until the mail is opened and distributed. Then the clerk is to search these envelopes to make sure that no enclosures have been overlooked, counting them at the same time, and checking with the previous count. Afterwards they may be destroyed.

## VIII. HANDLING OF FILED CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence is to be taken from the files except by the person or persons in charge of the files under any consideration. The correspondence which is already filed and is desired for reference can be secured only by a requisition, signed by the correspondent or person desiring it. The slip shown in Form V is a convenient form of requisition. The filing clerk files these requisitions alphabetically, according to the name of the individual or firm whose correspondence has been withdrawn. The clerk should see to it that the dates

of the specific letters withdrawn are entered on the requisition; if the whole folder is taken out, it should be so indicated.

Letters which go out on requisitions are to be stamped by the filing clerk with a rubber stamp "Out on Requisition. Date —," entering the date withdrawn. This is necessary in order to notify the clerk when these letters are returned to her with fresh letters to be filed; that these are requisitioned letters and that she must, therefore, withdraw the requisition from the file and destroy it.

The filing clerk should run through her requisitions periodically and send a follow-up to correspondents who have held out mail for some time, to see that they are not keeping it needlessly long. The individual to whom letters have been delivered on requisition is held responsible for them until returned to the file. In case he wishes to send these letters to another person or department, he should fill out a slip giving the names and dates of these letters, and place this in his "File" basket. This slip will come to the file clerk, who will then make the proper change on her requisition slip. The files should indicate at all times the location of correspondence. The letters themselves the correspondent places in the "Messenger" basket, from which they are gathered up and delivered to the proper person.

## IX. INSTRUCTIONS TO STENOGRAPHERS

Stenographers are to make carbon copies of all letters written. Carbons of letters written in reply to other letters are to be attached to the letters to which they reply; wherever practicable, they may be made on reverse side of correspondence received. It is essential

that this be done by the stenographer and not be left for the file clerk to do. The stenographer must be sure that the company, corporation, or partnership name appears on the carbon copy in writing to individuals connected with the same, even if it has to be written on after the original is written. Stenographers should use care in noting, when replying to letters, whether parties to whom reply is being made request the reply to refer to their file number or a certain department, and should comply with their request. File numbers and departments may be easily referred to by placing them in parenthesis in the center of the page above the body of the letter. Attention to these details will greatly assist in securing prompt attention to letters from the parties to whom they are written.

## X. INSTRUCTIONS TO CORRESPONDENTS

If a letter does not plainly indicate under what name it is to be filed, or if the correspondent wishes the letter filed under some other name than that of the writer, he should plainly indicate his wish by ringing with heavy pencil mark the name under which the letter is to be filed.

The correspondent should take care that no letters are sent to the file until his initials are placed over the number; if they are not there, letters will always be returned to him by the filing clerk.

Each correspondent should be sure to refer the date of the letter to which he replies. He should instruct his stenographer to see that the date of the letter to which he replies occurs on the carbon copy, if he neglects to refer to it himself in dictating. This is essential to rapid and easy reference, both for the filing

clerk and correspondent, and also for the parties with whom correspondence is being carried on.

## XI. INSTRUCTIONS TO FILING CLERKS

All unfiled correspondence for the numerical files will be marked with the number of the folder in which it belongs. It will be a convenience to circle the number with a large ring, and the file clerk who so marks the correspondence should place his initials below the number, so that errors in marking correspondence may be traced. For the same reason, if two or more persons are doing the filing each, as letters are filed, should place his initials on the lower right-hand corner of each letter.

File all letters on the left-hand edge, filing with the face of the letter toward the front of the file. If on account of inconvenient shape it is easier to file on the bottom of the letter than the left-hand side, do so, but see that the face of the letter is in all cases toward the front of the file. Letters should be filed in chronological order, beginning at the back of the folder and working toward the front as it stands in the file. If this method is pursued, when a correspondent opens a folder he will find the last letter written on top and each letter according to date underneath, in order. File no correspondence until the correspondent or his stenographer has crossed off the number on the sheet by his initials. Do not guess that the letter has been taken care of, but return it in every instance.

A filing clerk who is thoroughly reliable should be selected by the office manager; he should be thoroughly posted, and made absolutely responsible for the condition of the files at all times.